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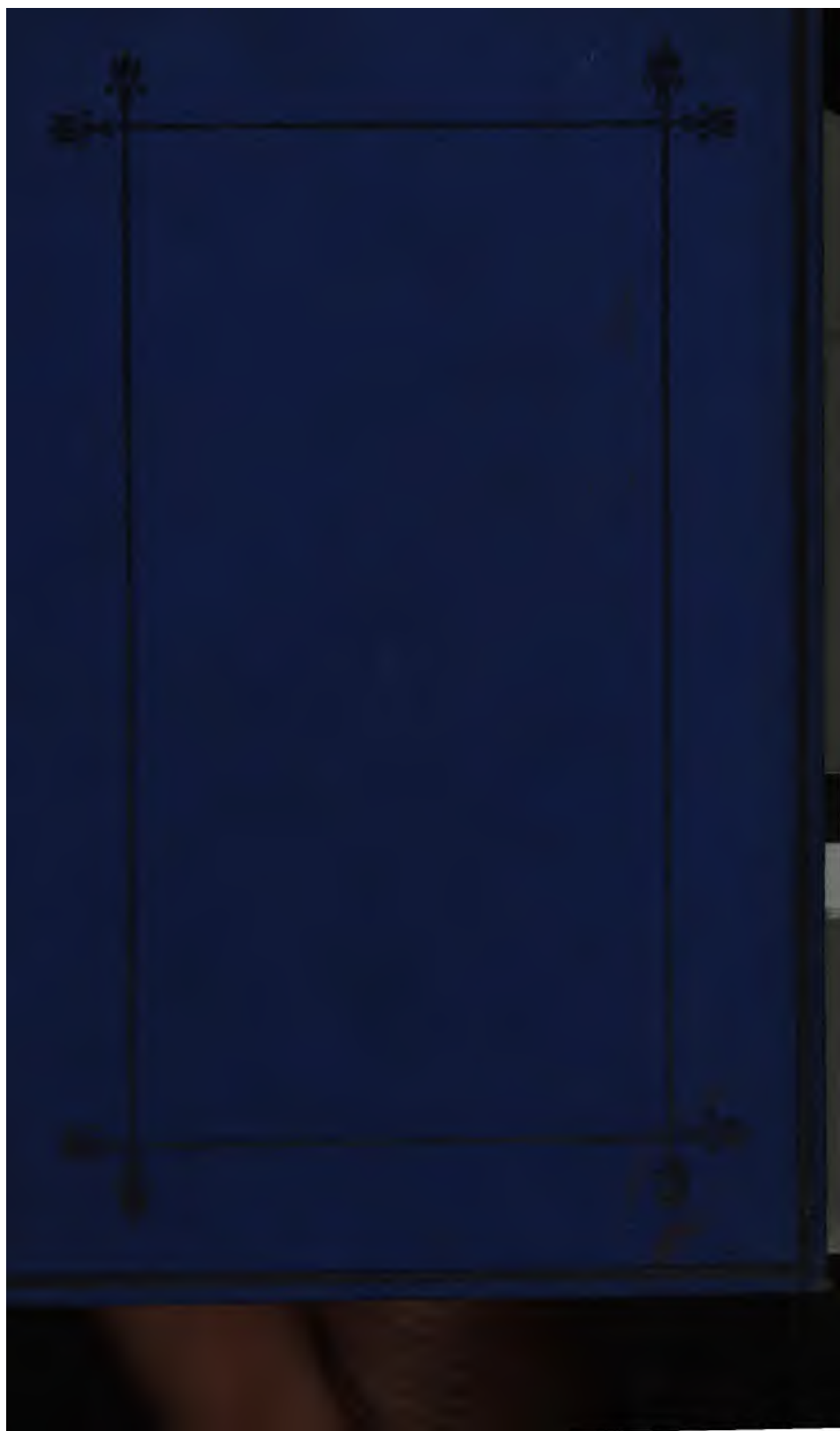
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**THE HEIR EXPECTANT.**

**VOL. II.**



# THE HEIR EXPECTANT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“RAYMOND’S HEROINE,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.


1870.

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250. x. 254.



LONDON :  
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,  
BLENHEIM HOUSE.



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OF  
THE SECOND VOLUME.

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# THE HEIR EXPECTANT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *Olivia Finds Something to Do.*

FOR a period of several days following the expedition to Brookston Mill, Olivia's impressions continued to be of the same dubious description. She was so unable to strike the balance of her feelings that she actually did not know whether the time was one of intense enjoyment or supreme dissatisfaction.

Certainly, so far as external facts went, she ought to have been enjoying herself. She was fond of an open-air life ; and an almost uninterrupted spell of fine weather, now beginning to assume the character of summer rather than of spring, enabled her to spend more time out of doors than ever. She liked to feel herself of

use, and in addition to Emmy's lessons she now had the variety of an occasional walk to Brookston to see Mrs. Griffiths and take her news of her husband's progress towards recovery. Then, as has already been shown, she found Mr. Graham a very pleasant companion, and Mr. Graham was now a daily visitor. Taking everything together, undoubtedly she ought to have found herself happy, and in a certain sense she did so—happier indeed, it sometimes seemed to her, than she had ever been in her life before.

And yet all the time there was something unsatisfactory about her enjoyment—something of incompleteness and imperfection which went far to spoil it altogether. Every day she had one or more relapses into that undefinable sense of disappointment which she had twice experienced during the walk to Brookston Mill (it is unquestionably very disagreeable when a person whom you had imagined to be more or less interested in what you were saying suddenly turns off to something else); and as the time drew near for the break-up of the pleasant party at Nidbourne, this uncomfortable feeling

became more and more settled. And really, when one considers how happy they had been there, it was only natural that Olivia and everybody else should feel a little low-spirited at the prospect of leaving. For the same day which had been fixed for Mr. Graham's journey to Southampton was to witness the return of the three ladies to Chorcombe, where the Laurels had now been put into perfect habitable order. There had been some talk of Austin Waters coming down himself to Nidbourne to fetch them, and to spend a day or two in the company of his old friend Mr. Graham ; but to the great vexation of Emmy, who had fancied that her father's demeanour towards his visitor would certainly enable her to solve the doubts which she still could not help harbouring, this plan was given up when the time came to put it into execution. Mr. Waters wrote to say that he found his personal supervision of the building operations at Chorcombe Lodge not to be dispensed with ; and as the tone of his correspondence had from the first shown the progress of the works to be a subject of paramount interest with him, even Emmy could not

draw any deduction from this circumstance.

Thus time passed on, always increasing Olivia's tendency to dissatisfaction with herself and others, till at length the date fixed for departure was close at hand—so close that one fine afternoon in the latter half of May she found herself on her way to Brookston to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. Griffiths. She could not have accounted for it, but somehow on that day she felt more out of sorts and out of spirits than she had done yet. On the one hand she was saddened by the idea of a pleasant episode of her life being so near its end, and on the other hand she was depressed and humiliated by the profound conviction that in reality it had not been pleasant at all. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" was the moral which she found written everywhere—in her own heart, in the foliage of the lanes, in the sunny slope of the fields, in the glitter of the distant sea. For even the beauties of external nature, set off by the mellow light of the afternoon sun, failed to please her; and the now familiar landmarks of the way, only reminded her, when she noticed them at all, how much happier she had been on the day

that she had seen them first, walking to Brookston with the rain driving in her face and the wind whistling about her ears. She had not known at the time how much she was enjoying herself, but she knew it now—now that all the enjoyment was over, and only dust and ashes were left behind. Not that even in the recesses of her own mind she interpreted her discontent in terms so definite as these, but the words, if they do not express precisely what she thought, at least express with more or less accuracy what she felt.

It was necessary at last to make some attempt at rousing herself, her walk having brought her before the humble dwelling which was her destination. She tapped at the door, which after a short delay Mrs. Griffiths came to open.

“Good afternoon,” said Olivia in the most cheerful voice she could command. “Well, I have come to bid you good-bye for the present. To-morrow is to be our last day at Nidbourne, and so——But dear me, Mrs. Griffiths, how ill you are looking! What is the matter?”



She had just noticed that the poor woman appeared quite changed since they had met last, three or four days ago—her pale sunken cheeks, swollen eye-lids, and general air of lassitude and languor seeming to tell a tale of bodily suffering.

“I ha’ been a-veelen a bit dumpy like, miss, since last time I zeed you. I took cwold two or dree days agoo, I think, a-comen hwome vrom the invirmary where I’d been a-zeein’ my poor maister—it come on to rain, and I got wet drough, and ha’ never been rightly myzelf zince. Be pleased to zit down, miss.”

Speaking thus she crossed the room to bring her guest a chair, but with such feeble tottering steps that Olivia was quite concerned.

“Take that one yourself, Mrs. Griffiths; this will do for me. Dear me, I am afraid you are worse than I thought.”

“My head is zoo bad, miss,” said the poor creature, sinking down on the seat nearest her. “I do hope thik woon idden all over wi’ doust, miss, but I ha’ done nothen to zet the place to rights to-day—what wi’ veelen zoo weak like,

and the childern to mind, you know," she added apologetically.

"What! the children to mind when you are so ill?" said Olivia, glancing at a corner where the two elder children sat on the floor by the baby's cradle, playing with an old set of battered wooden soldiers. "But you have had somebody to help you, surely?"

Mrs. Griffiths shook her head. "I'm in hopes I shall have to-morrow, miss, vor veelen zoo queer this mornen I writ to my mother who lives wi' my married zister not mwore than an hour's journey by rail vrom Nidbourne, and I know she's sartain to come by vust train to-morrow if zoo be there's nothen wrong."

"She will not come this evening then?"

"She woont geet my letter avore the evenen, miss. Ha' done, Bobby, let her have the soldier back again, there's a good bwoy. I hope you don't veel cwold a-zitten zoo vur vrom the fire, miss."

"Cold! Why, it is quite a summer's day."

"Ah yees! I vorgot, zoo it ought to be. But I ha' been zoo cwold all day myzself—it made me think you mid be cwold too."


She drew her shawl more tightly round her, and shivered. Olivia looked at her compassionately.

"I am afraid you are really very ill. Have you not sent for the doctor?"

"I ha' had noo woon to zend, miss. We han't had a zoul near us all day except the pwoostman when I called him in to take my letter. Ah! I do veel zoo lwonesome like 'ithout my poor dear maister—zoo lwonesome, noo woon knows."

"He will soon be with you again," said Olivia soothingly. "But tell me exactly how you feel. Are you at all feverish?"

"I don't know, miss, but, but——" here the words were drowned in a burst of tears. "Oh! miss, you'll think me very wicked to take on zoo, but I can't help it. Vor I keep thinken of poor Mrs. Collins up the way that died last winter of typhus, and it come on just zoo, wi' veelen cwold an' shivery. And oh! if I were to have en, miss, what should I do, wi' my husband a-lyen wi' his poor broken lag and noo woon to look to the childern, and they to catch en too, perhaps, vor they do zay as how it is zoo



catchen, an' it went drough two or dree of the Collinses——And oh! I never thought o' that, perhaps I'm a-given en to you this very minute. Oh! goo hwome, miss dear, goo hwome, please, or I shall never vorgie myzelf."

"I shall go home when I have seen you properly attended to, but certainly not before. Where does the doctor live?"

"Oh! half a mile up the rwoad nearly, in the gert white house o' the right-han' zide. But don't trouble about that, miss dear, it wull only take you out o' your way vor nothen. Goo hwome, do pray goo hwome."

"Yes, yes, all in good time. Let me see—the great white house half a mile up the road on the right-hand side. And now can you give me the name of some neighbour who might be willing to come and sit up all night with you and look after the children? It would never do to leave you by yourself till morning, you know."

The poor mother cast an anxious look towards the little ones.

"It mid be a good thing if zome woon 'ud come," she admitted despondingly, "but I don't

know who 'tis to be. You zee it idden long we ha' lived here, and we ha' always kept ourzelves zoo quiet to ourzelves like——There's Mrs. Cox just at the bend o' the rwoad wi' the honeyzuckle avore the door—she ha' noo childern to mind but a big bwoy, and were very vriendly last winter a-comen to ask vor water when she were vrozen out. But 'tis noo good; I don't s'pose she would vor all that. No, no, miss, you goo hwome, and don't think noo more about it. I were a gert big baby to make sich a vuss, but the walken zoo many times back'ards and vor'ards to the invirmary, and the vretten, and the lyen awake o' nights ha' took all the strangth out o' me like. There, I'm a-veelen better already; 'twere all my vancy, I'll engage. You goo hwome, miss, there's a dear, and I'll tell you what, I'll goo to doctor's myzelf, the air 'ull do me good."

She rose with feverish alacrity, and, making a few hasty steps forward, put up her hand to take down a faded bonnet that hung against the wall. But before she had reached it she tottered, and would have fallen had it not been for the timely assistance of her visitor, who

rushed forward and caught her by the arm ; and even with this support she stood for a minute or two shaking and trembling so violently that Olivia feared every moment to see her faint away.

“You must go and lie down immediately,” said Olivia authoritatively, as soon as she saw her patient somewhat recovering. The poor woman still murmured something that sounded like an entreaty to “goo hwome,” but was too conscious of her own helplessness to offer further resistance. She was indeed very ill—so ill that it was as much as Olivia could do to get her at last laid in her own bed in the next room. This having been done, and the invalid being made as comfortable as the humble means at command admitted, Olivia, having left the bedroom door open so that the mother’s voice might if necessary keep discipline among the children, took her hasty way towards the doctor’s house.

The doctor’s house she had no difficulty in finding, but to her great concern the doctor himself was not forthcoming. He had gone out, she was told, on a round of visits, and was not ex-

pected home till late in the evening. She was greatly disappointed, but, as there was no other doctor in the place, all she could do was to leave a message begging that he might call on Mrs. Griffiths as soon as he returned, and then to hurry away on her remaining business.

She stopped presently in front of a pretty little cottage half overgrown with honeysuckle; and, having ascertained from a lad who was at work in the tiny garden that this was Mrs. Cox's, she went up to the door and knocked. Her summons was answered by a stout comfortable-looking woman, evidently the mistress of the house.

"I have called to see if you would mind sitting up to-night with your neighbour Mrs. Griffiths. She is very ill—much too ill to be left alone, and besides, there are the children to look after. Do you feel inclined to come? It will be only for one night, for she expects her mother in the morning, and I will make it well worth your while."

Mrs. Cox's face brightened up wonderfully at the last words.

"Tis very good of you to zay zoo, miss," she

answered dropping a curtsey, "and like your kind heart too, vor I s'pose you be the young lady Mrs. Griffiths is always a-talken about. An' zoo she's ill—deary me, that's a bad job. An' what's the matter?"

"She seems so weak and tired out that I almost fancy low spirits may have something to do with it. But it is right to tell you that she herself is afraid of typhus fever."

Mrs. Cox's countenance fell perceptibly.

"Fever!" she repeated, and half mechanically shook her head.

"You will not go then?" said Olivia.

"I'd do anything to oblige a young lady sich as you, miss, I'm sure," was the somewhat embarrassed reply. "But I were always mortal afeard of fever, as is but natural, you know, miss, when you think of the zight of volks he cars off, and poor Mrs. Collins only this very year. Zoo I'm sartain you woon't think none the wuss of a poor body, miss, vor veelen a bit shy like; and Mrs. Griffiths I didden know her vrom Adam till she come here zix months agoo—an' she a-married to a Welsh chap and all; 'tis my consait woon of theasem volks ought



to come and nuss her. You can't blame me vor not a-liken to goo, can you now, miss?"

"Oh dear no! I don't blame you in the least," said Olivia; "indeed if I knew it was a case of fever I am not sure that I should have asked you. I am sorry of course, but if you are really afraid there is nothing else to be said."

"I'm sure I'm zorry's any woon can be," said the woman, who, whether from genuine pity for her neighbour's troubles, or from reluctance to forfeit the young lady's promised bounty, did really look very regretful. "'Tis a hard case vor sartain; I don't zee how poor Mrs. Griffiths is to geet drough the night by herzelf if she's zoo ill—do you, miss? An' yeet, if noo woon 'ull goo to her, what's to be done?"

"Oh! that can be easily managed. I will sit up with her myself."

"Zit up wi' her yourzelf! But you be a-joken, miss, sure?"

"No—why should I be joking? I never should have thought of anything else, only that I fancied you might be able to mauage the children better than I could, and then I have friends at Nidbourne who are expecting me back this even-

ing. And that reminds me, perhaps you could manage to get a message sent for me just that they may not be anxious. This is your son, I suppose?" and she turned towards the lad already spoken of.

"Yees, miss, an' quite at your sarvice," said Mrs. Cox eagerly, glad to find an opportunity of obliging a person whose generosity she had more than once heard praised by her neighbour. "Here, Tom, come an' show yourself," and Tom thus adjured came sidling awkwardly up.

Olivia took a note-book from her pocket, and, tearing out a blank leaf, rapidly wrote a few lines informing Mrs. Waters and Emmy why and where she was detained, and promising to rejoin them on the morrow provided Mrs. Griffiths's illness should turn out to be non-infectious.

Having finished her note, she gave it to the boy with a few words of direction and a couple of half-crowns—a donation so stimulative of zeal that she had the satisfaction of seeing her messenger started on his walk forthwith under the strictest injunctions from his mother to be quick and lose no time. This matter settled, Olivia

prepared to take her way back to Mrs. Griffiths.

“It do vex me, to be sure,” dolefully insisted Mrs. Cox, whom a little persuasion might probably even yet have induced to undertake the duties of sick-nurse for a sufficient consideration. “I’m ashamed to think of en, zoo I am—a lady like you a-taken sich a deal o’ trouble.”

“Oh! you need not mind about that, thank you; I shall be none the worse for the trouble, but all the better.”

And so saying, Olivia turned and went blithely on her way. She was actually all the better already for what she was going to do, and felt so happy as she hastened along the road in the pleasant light of the declining sun that, remembering the poor invalid who awaited her, she was almost scandalised at her own elation.

She made a brief halt at a little provision shop on the way, and shortly afterwards, laden with sundry packets of tea and sago and arrow-root and jelly and other such luxuries, appeared once more in Mrs. Griffiths’s little cottage. Here she found that everything had gone on

well during her absence; that is to say, the children had got into no mischief worth mentioning, and their mother, though still complaining of tremor and chilliness, was, if no better, at all events apparently no worse.

And now it was that Olivia set to work in good earnest. First of course she attended to her patient, compounding with the aid of one of the packets aforesaid a warm drink which had no sooner been taken than it seemed to produce a wonderfully composing effect. Next, having done everything she could think of to make the mother comfortable, she devoted her energies to the children. It was a long time before the children were disposed of. She had to give them their suppers; and then she had to prepare their night quarters in a tiny upstairs chamber which the cottage by good fortune contained, and where she judged that they would be safer from any possible infection than in either of the rooms downstairs; and then she had to undress them and get them to bed; and then, hardest task of all, she had to induce them to fall asleep amid their unfamiliar surroundings. When this was accomplished, and everything

was quiet above, she came downstairs again, and, finding to her great joy that the invalid had fallen into a doze, she passed noiselessly into the kitchen, where she found occupation for another quarter of an hour in trying to make things look a little tidy for the doctor. Finally, it being almost dusk, she discovered that she was a little tired and thirsty, and set about getting some tea for herself.

She had certainly worked hard for her tea, and deserved to have it in peace. But just as she had sat down and was in the act of pouring out her first cup, somebody tapped at the door, and she had to rise to open it. She was however rather glad than otherwise of the interruption, for she naturally thought that this must be the doctor.

She opened the door and for a moment thought so still. A gentleman was there, whose face she could not distinguish, it being turned towards her, and away from the light of the clear evening sky without.

"Miss Egerton," said a voice she knew—a voice so familiar to her, and at the same time so

unexpected under the circumstances, that its sound set her trembling from head to foot.

It was not the doctor, but Mr. Graham.

## CHAPTER II.

*Olivia and her Visitor.*

ON recognising in the new-comer Mr. Graham, Olivia was so much surprised that, fearing lest her discomfiture should be observed, she attempted an explanation.

“I—I did not know you at first. I was expecting the doctor.”

“I hope I have not startled you. But I was with Mrs. Waters when she got your message, and it made us—made her—so anxious that—”

“I am very sorry,” she stammered, for there was something in his manner that increased her agitation tenfold, “but—but there is nothing for her to be anxious about. I am making myself very comfortable, and—oh yes! you may come in and look if you like,” she added as he made a step forward. “You see I am really

very well off; this is a very snug little room, and now that my patient is asleep, I have nothing to do but to minister to my own comfort."

She spoke the last words with an attempt at cheerfulness and unconcern which she felt to be so clumsy that she was quite provoked with herself. But Mr. Graham was engaged with his own thoughts, and had not been attending.

"And you think of stopping in this place all night?" he asked, with a glance from her to the poor interior, and then back to her again.

"It was really a case of necessity," she said apologetically. "I could not get anybody else to come, and if you had seen how helpless the poor woman was——"

"But you said something in your note about infection. What is the matter?"

"She has caught a bad cold, and is very weak, and that makes her fanciful and low-spirited. I do not think it is anything worse."

"Is she afraid of something worse then?"

"It seems that a neighbour died of typhus fever last winter," admitted Olivia reluctantly,



“and she has taken it into her head that perhaps——”

“Miss Egerton, you must let me take you home at once. It is out of the question that you should expose yourself to such a danger.”

He spoke more impetuously than Olivia had ever heard him, and she felt her heart swell with a strange sense of joy and triumph. But in spite of her emotion—emotion which she had much ado to conceal—she still stood her ground.

“You are very kind, but I must stay through this night at any rate. There is nobody else to be had, and if that poor creature is really ill with typhus fever her life may depend on having some one at hand to watch her.”

“But your own life—have you not considered that perhaps you are risking——”

“I have seen you risk your life in a much more dangerous enterprise,” said Olivia with a smile, but as she smiled she felt her eyes grow so dim that she was quite grateful to the friendly twilight which screened her from too searching a scrutiny. “You have been a thousand times more of a benefactor in this house

than ever I can be; I wonder you grudge me the pleasure of doing a little good too." She paused, warned by a slight break in her voice that the subject was not a safe one, and added hastily: "And really I don't believe there is the slightest risk in the matter. I think the case is only one of severe cold."

"What does the doctor say?" asked Mr. Graham thoughtfully.

"The doctor!" said Olivia, a little put out. "Oh! the doctor has not seen her yet. He was out when I went to fetch him, and was not expected back till quite late."

"He is to call here on his return?"

"Yes, I left a particular message for him."

"Then I will wait till he comes. I should like to hear what he has to say."

Again Olivia was conscious of a thrill of pleasure. And so it seemed that there was at all events one person in the world to whom her fate was a matter of more or less interest without reference to money considerations! She thought it necessary to protest against Mr. Graham's giving himself so much trouble, but she was aware that she did so very feebly.

"I cannot be content to go till I know whether it is safe for you to remain," was all he answered.

Suddenly a new apprehension occurred to her. For the first time she regarded the danger of infection as something more than imaginary.

"Surely it is very imprudent," she said anxiously. "If it should really be typhus——"

"You seemed to be quite certain just now it was nothing of the sort," he replied, smiling. "But whatever it may be, you need have no fears for a seasoned old Indian like me."

She saw that all further attempts at dissuasion would be useless, and for some time remained without speaking, partly from an embarrassing sense of not knowing what to say, partly from a vague feeling of satisfaction with which silence was more congenial than words. Presently she remembered that, as Mr. Graham was waiting there on her account, she was bound to do what she could to entertain him.

"Will you not sit down?" she said nervously

—they had both been standing all this time. “And perhaps you will let me give you a cup of tea.”

He assented, and both took their places at the homely tea-table. And now there fell on Olivia a feeling of constraint and shyness greater than she had ever yet experienced in the presence of Mr. Graham or of any other human being. It seemed so strange to be sitting there pouring out his tea for him, at that little table, in that little room, with the subdued light of the evening sky and the uncertain flicker of the fire making everything about them dim and unreal. She was at an utter loss how to bear herself, hardly dared speak lest her voice should not be under control, hardly dared raise her eyes lest they should meet other eyes looking at her. As Mr. Graham on his part seemed to be almost equally oppressed by the novelty of the situation, it need not be said that the conversation went very slowly and heavily. And yet somehow its heaviness did not particularly strike either of them.

“What will you do if the doctor pronounces it typhus?” asked Mr. Graham, after one of the

long intervals of silence which were constantly occurring.

"I shall have nothing to do but to run my chance," said Olivia as lightly as she could. "I cannot leave the poor woman without a nurse in the middle of the night, you know. But I am so little afraid of it that I don't think I should be liable to infection myself."

"No?"

"No, and as for carrying it to others, a few days of quarantine would make me quite safe in that respect, I suppose."

She paused and bit her lip. Might not Mr. Graham think that for a poor governess she was disposing very coolly of her time? She hastened to put herself right by adding:

"I should be very sorry not to be able to travel with Mrs. Waters, of course. But I was not going direct to her house, so that it will not make so very much difference."

"Not going to her house!" he said, with an accent of surprise. "You are parting from her then! But not altogether surely?"

"Oh no! not altogether," faltered Olivia, for she was rather ashamed of the equivocation—

and yet, if she wanted to keep her secret, what was she to do? "I—I—am going to spend a little time at home."

"Oh! at home!" he repeated, and was silent for a few seconds. He had never heard her speak of her home before, and felt as it were taken by surprise. "Is your home far from here?" he demanded presently.

"It is in Somersetshire," responded Olivia nervously.

"In Somersetshire! Not very far from Chorcombe then?"

"N—no, not very."

There was another pause, during which Olivia was considering how she might change the conversation, and Mr. Graham how he might elicit some more information on a subject in which he could not help feeling interested.

"It must be a great pleasure to look forward to, going home to your friends."

"I have very few friends—very few relations, that is," she answered evasively. "Only an uncle and aunt and cousins."

"No nearer relations than these?"

"No, my parents are both dead, and I never

had either brother or sister."


"That is being very lonely."

"Yes," faintly acquiesced Olivia. She knew not how it was, but all her strength seemed gone, and she could not say another word, could not even consider what to say—could only sit with downward-turned eyes and wait for what might be coming next.

There was a very long silence—so long that an invisible spectator who might have been present would have thought that the two had fallen into a kind of waking dream. And in truth as they sat there in the gathering dusk, with the light from the window growing ever dimmer and dimmer, and the quivering shadows cast by the fire darker and more pronounced, a strange dream-like influence made itself felt upon both, so that some (not all) of the actualities of the present were well-nigh lost sight of. The outlines of the poor cottage room and poorer furniture, blurred and blotted in the uncertain mingling of the natural and artificial lights, suggested to each of the two a scene widely different from the reality. Olivia could almost have fancied herself in a certain little parlour in Eger-

ton House where she was accustomed to take tea in the winter evenings, and which she had sometimes found so dull, so dull!—but it did not look dull now. And Mr. Graham was half inclined to believe that he was back in his study in Bombay; only who was this that sat near him, filling the hitherto vacant chamber with a sense of companionship? It will be seen that the imaginations of both were in an unusual state of tension.

Still there was nothing said on either side. Once Olivia was aware that Mr. Graham turned towards her as though about to speak, and the flutter of her heart increased tenfold. But almost in the same moment she heard something like a suppressed sigh, and knew that his eyes were withdrawn again. The silence lasted some time longer—lasted till it became absolutely necessary that one of them should break it, and then Mr. Graham remarked what a fine evening it was. Olivia replied that the weather was really quite extraordinary, but, cheerful as the answer was, she felt the old chilling sense of disappointment creeping back upon her as she made it.





"I wish the doctor would come," she said presently ; and indeed she heartily wished now that he would, though a few minutes ago she would have been content to wait for him for ever.

"He is not later than you expected, is he?"

"Oh no ! But it is such a pity you should be kept waiting, and really it is so unnecessary—"

"It does not signify how long I wait. I am not in the slightest hurry."

"You are very kind. I am afraid you must find it very wearisome."

"No, indeed, I——"

He stopped suddenly, and Olivia, to whom the energy of his manner had again imparted a momentary flurry, was left with a disagreeable sensation, half of pique, half of humiliation.

"I must see about a light—it is getting so dark," she said, not perhaps without a touch of petulance ; and, rising as abruptly as though she had only just made the discovery, she took down a candle from the chimney-piece. She had an idea that this would be the best way of breaking the spell which the mystic

glimmer of the firelight had cast about her senses, and set about the simple business of striking a light with a feeling almost of defiance.

But she soon found that matters were no-wise mended. The shadows conjured up by imagination had indeed vanished, but the reality remained, and was brought into more embarrassing relief than ever. As she put the candle on the table her eyes happened to meet those of her visitor; and the glance made her feel so shy and nervous that on resuming her place she hardly knew what to do with herself. She fussed for a minute or two over the empty tea-cups, arranging them with great mathematical precision on two corresponding bunches of flaring flowers coarsely painted on the gaudy blue tray; and then, muttering something about "work," drew a ball of cotton from her pocket and began manipulating a crochet-needle as energetically as though her very life depended on it.

Probably Mr. Graham was almost equally at a loss. He did not speak for some time, and when he did it was only to ask a question in which he manifestly could have felt no manner

of interest, as to what kind of work Olivia was doing.

"Why, crochet, to be sure!" said Olivia, with an awkward little laugh which quite grated on her ear as she heard it—it sounded so affected. "Are you really so ignorant as not to know?"

"I never saw it before that I remember."

"Never saw it before!" and she tried another little laugh, but it turned out much like the former one. "Are the ladies in India so very idle then?"

"I cannot say what the ladies in India are. I know so little about them."

"What! after living there so long! That is stranger and stranger."

"It is quite true. I have seen more of ladies' society in the last fortnight than I had seen for nearly twenty years before—or than I shall see for twenty years again probably."

Olivia laughed once more, but said nothing. There had been something in the last words which jarred upon her, and she thought to herself somewhat pettishly what a good thing it would be if that doctor would only come.

The wish was hardly formed when a heavy footstep was heard, and an authoritative tap sounded at the door. The doctor had really come at last. And yet, oddly enough, now that he had come Olivia felt as though she would rather that he had stayed away a little longer.

Before the summons could be answered, the door was opened from without, and the doctor made his appearance—a little stout brisk-looking man of middle age who bustled in as if bent on making up for lost time.

“ Well, well, my good soul,” he began cheerily, “ and how——” here, finding himself confronted by a lady and gentleman, he hastened to apologise. “ Excuse me, ma’am, excuse me, sir—I really had no idea——”

Olivia briefly explained the circumstances under which she had found Mrs. Griffiths that afternoon, and then, not waiting to receive the little man’s compliments on her courage, went into the back room to waken the poor woman and prepare her for the visit. In a minute more she beckoned the doctor into the back room also, and Mr. Graham was left alone, waiting not without some anxiety for the verdict.

He had not been waiting long when Olivia returned, with the doctor bustling after her.

"She will soon get well," announced Olivia joyfully in answer to Mr. Graham's look of inquiry. "And there is no danger of infection whatever."

"The case is one of ague," said the doctor magisterially—"ague-complicated with derangement of the biliary and nervous systems. It might have been very serious if neglected, or in the absence of proper professional assistance, but with skilful and judicious treatment—oh! I don't doubt but what we shall bring her round in a very few days."

"And you are sure this lady will run no risk by remaining here all night?"

"Not the slightest, if the lady is so kind as not to object to the trouble. Let me see—" and the doctor pulled out a ponderous watch which he was fond of consulting on all occasions—"it is rather late for finding anybody to relieve you, but——"

"But I don't want to be relieved, thank you. I am getting quite used to my duties now, and won't give them up to a stranger."

“Well, well, you are very kind, I’m sure—quite a good Samaritan, eh? And now I’ll go home if you please, and see about sending the medicine—once every four hours, you know. And you can give her a basin of hot gruel for supper as soon as you can get it ready—just to induce a gentle perspiration. Hum—my hat and gloves—I think I put them——”

While the doctor was fumbling about for his things Mr. Graham went up to Olivia.

“I think I had better leave too,” he said, putting out his hand. “It is getting very late, and I have a long way to go.”

“Oh yes! of course,” answered Olivia, and put out her hand also. But though she was so ready to say good-bye, she felt a singular sensation of blankness and desolation come over her as she discovered that she was thus going to be left alone.

By this time the doctor had found his hat and gloves, and with a polite bow was preparing to depart. Mr. Graham followed him to the door, and both gentlemen passed out together.

The cottage stood a little way back from the

road, so that they had a score or two of yards to go before they separated.

"Uncommonly good of the lady, to be sure," remarked the doctor as they went down the little field-path. "I don't believe you would find one in a thousand to do as much, that I don't. No joke to sit up all night in a place like that, you know."

"It is very kind of her, certainly," assented Mr. Graham meditatively.

"Wonderfully kind, I call it," declared the doctor. "And equally so of you to allow it, of course."

"Of me!" said Mr. Graham with a start.

"Yes, 'pon my word I think it is. But well, some wives deserve more of their own way than others, don't they? And now, sir, this is my road; let me see, which is yours? Down to Nidbourne, I suppose? Ah! then we must part company. A nice mild night for a walk, that's one thing. Good evening."

"Good evening," answered Mr. Graham in rather a stifled voice.

"I hope you will get the lady back all right in the morning, and none the worse for her

fatigues," and with these parting words the little man moved off.

It was a good thing he did not wait for a reply, for Mr. Graham found himself for the moment quite unable to make one. All his faculties had been suddenly thrown into unwonted turmoil, and for some time he stood rooted to the spot in a reverie which he could not shake off. Did the doctor think then that—that he and Olivia——And yet evidently the doctor thought so; what else could he have meant? What a strange mistake to make! and yet perhaps a natural mistake when one came to think of it—there was nothing intrinsically impossible or even improbable—nothing but what indeed under other circumstances——

He roused himself with a violent effort; time was running on, and he had his walk in prospect. But before setting out he cast one look back at the cottage. The night, though clear, was moonless and almost starless, and the little dwelling would hardly have been distinguishable from the darkness surrounding it but for a light which showed through one of the windows. He knew that this was the window of the room where

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he had been spending the evening, and he took an unaccountable pleasure in gazing back on it and picturing to himself all that was behind it. Then again he roused himself, and turned his face towards Nidbourne.

The prospect was very gloomy and desolate. So much of the road as was visible through the darkness stretched before him in a dreary monotonous line, bordered on each side with ghostly-looking hedgerows, and here and there with ghostlier-looking trees which swayed and nodded with grim funereal motion in the night breeze. He could not forbear glancing round once more at the cottage window. The light was still there, glowing as brightly and cheerfully as ever, and seeming to send forth a friendly message of hope and gladness through the night. He half involuntarily made a step towards it as he looked.

He paused, and again cast his eyes in the direction of Nidbourne, but again drew a step nearer the lighted window. Then for a minute or two he stood still and wavered, looking first one way and then the other, as though doubtful which to choose. At last, with what seemed to

be a sudden influx of energy, he took his resolution, and with a step rapid and no longer faltering made straight for the cottage. The door was not yet fastened for the night, and, lifting the latch gently, he pushed it open and looked in.

He stood for a while motionless on the threshold, not pausing this time, however, in doubt or indecision, but simply because his gaze was riveted and he could not withdraw it. Not that anything was going on in that humble interior which to an ordinary observer would have been specially interesting. The invalid's gruel was being prepared, and the self-appointed nurse, her face turned away so that the features could not be discerned, was standing at the fire to watch it—nothing more than this. And yet he gazed as though that common-place business of gruel-making had been the spectacle in all the world the best worth studying.

"Olivia!" he said at last, making a step forward.

He had got to think of her as Olivia by seeing that name affixed to some of her drawings, and just now it rose so naturally to his lips that

he was in utter unconsciousness of having said anything unusual.

She started violently, and looked half round, then let her eyelids droop, and with partially averted face stood in trembling silence before him. His return had taken her altogether by surprise, and yet evidently it was something more than surprise that agitated her.

“Olivia, I love you. Will you be my wife?”

Her breath came and went so quickly that she could hardly stand. She stretched out one hand towards the chimney-piece to save herself from falling, putting up the other before her eyes with an involuntary attempt to conceal an emotion of which she was half ashamed.

In spite of her averted face, in spite of her eyes covered with her hand, there was something in her manner which inspired him with hope rather than fear. He advanced nearer, near enough to touch the folds of her dress, and, finding that she made no motion to avoid him, ventured to put his hand gently on that with which she still grasped the chimney-piece. She did not withdraw it, and in another moment his fingers had closed round it with a

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strong tender clasp—a more effectual support this than the chimney-piece ten thousand times. He felt now that he had not hoped in vain, and yet he longed to hear his hopes confirmed by her voice.

“Won’t you speak to me, won’t you look at me—just one word, one look, to let me know that I may be happy? For my happiness all depends on you, Olivia, or rather I never knew what happiness could be till you taught me.”

She turned her eyes towards him for an instant—only for an instant, for she shrank from letting him see the depth of gladness that was in them.

“Oh! Mr. Graham!” she murmured, and then stopped, unable to say a word more.

“Mr. Graham!” he echoed reproachfully.

“Henry, then,” she whispered blushing.

She knew his name was Henry because she had once heard Mrs. Waters tell Emmy so, and though the information was never repeated she had not forgotten it.

He put his arm round her—no fear of her falling now, though chimney-pieces had never been invented—and drew her close to his heart.

"My darling, my own darling, my wife!" and then he was silent from very excess of joy. When he spoke next it was to say, smoothing the glossy braids of her dark hair caressingly the while: "Let it be Harry, love, from you—that was my name when I had a home, and it must be my name again."

"Harry," she repeated deliberately, but though she cunningly made it appear that she was trying how the word sounded, she had really spoken it for no better reason than because uttering his name was a pleasure to her.

"Do you not like it best too?" he asked.

"I think I do. But—but——"

"But what?"

"But then I should like best any name that was yours," she managed to answer, calling all her courage to her aid.

"Olivia!" he exclaimed, and acknowledged the compliment with a rapture that made her feel half guilty for having paid it.

Each of the two was so happy in the other that by this time they had forgotten the existence of everything and everybody in the world

beside, and there is no saying how long this pleasant oblivion might have lasted but for an untimely interruption which just then took place. A nightmare dream, sent perhaps for that express purpose by some malicious spirit, chanced to wake one of the children upstairs, who forthwith began to cry so lustily as to disturb not only the two other little sleepers above, but the invalid in the next room, whose voice was heard feebly demanding what *was* the matter.

"There, I am wanted," said Olivia, looking up into her lover's face with a bright smile, while with difficulty she disengaged her hand. "Good night—no, you must not keep me another moment."

"I may wait till you come back," he pleaded.

"No, no, it may be an hour before I get them to sleep again, and it is so late—There, you hear" (the disturbance still continued unabated) —"I must really—good-bye—Harry." She did not know how she found effrontery enough to add the last word, but she found it somehow.

. "Good-bye then, but I will come to claim my

treasure in the morning." As he spoke he detained her in spite of her hurry for one other instant, and then, releasing her all covered with blushes, tore himself away and plunged into the dark night without, only it did not appear dark now.

Meanwhile Olivia, having first looked in to say a friendly word to the poor mother, ran upstairs in great haste to restore order. But notwithstanding her haste, which left her no time for reflection, she knew without reflection that she was happy—intensely, ecstatically happy, happier than she had ever been, or had ever imagined it possible to be, in her whole life before.

## CHAPTER III.

*Across the Fields.*

THE morning sun shone brightly on Mrs. Griffiths's little cottage, lighting up as with the sparkle of a thousand diamonds the rustic window which last night had sent that friendly message through the darkness, kissing into fuller life the fresh spring foliage of surrounding trees and hedges, filling the air with the scent of wild flowers and the song of birds, and in a word making of the spot a very paradise upon earth. At least so the spot appeared to Mr. Graham as he approached it this morning in quest of his betrothed.

He found Olivia liberated from her attendance in the sick-room, and ready to set out. Everything had gone perfectly well since he had left her the evening before, a good night's rest having



done wonders towards the patient's recovery, and this morning the expected relief had arrived in the person of Mrs. Griffiths's mother—a worthy old soul whose gratitude to the gentleman who had saved her son-in-law's life, and to the young lady who had done so much for her daughter, was quite embarrassing in its effusiveness.

As soon as it was possible for them to get away without wounding her feelings, Olivia and her lover started on their walk, followed to the door of the cottage by the old woman, who continued to stand there as long as they were in sight, wishing them God-speed. Something of the inner joy which overflowed their hearts must have shown itself externally in their manner or appearance, for she evidently had a shrewd notion of what was going on.

“God bless you both and make you as happy's you ha' made us thease day, and a better blessen the parson himzelf woont be able to gie you.”

The words made Olivia blush very uncomfortably, and yet on the whole she could not regret that they had been spoken. The good wishes of an old country woman imported little or nothing doubtless in a philosophical point of

view, but Olivia, walking from the cottage by the side of her future husband with that simple form of benediction sounding in her ears, could not help feeling that she was entering on her new era of existence under a fortunate augury.

The cottage and its occupants were left behind out of sight and out of hearing, and silently the lovers, quitting the road which had looked so dreary and monotonous the night before—not that it would have looked dreary or monotonous now—took their way across a green stretch of sunlit meadow-land in the direction of Nidbourne. For some time they walked on without speaking, but more eloquent than any words were the glances which (accidentally of course) were every now and then exchanged between them—glances that dyed Olivia's cheeks with blushes half of shame, half of grateful joy and pride that knew no bounds. Never in her life had she looked half so radiant, never in her life had she felt half so exultant. So at last that which she had sometimes dreamed of, but never in sober earnest looked for, was a reality, and she was loved, loved for her own sake, loved by one so noble and good and generous that

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his love was the highest of all earthly honours. As she thought these things, she would lift her eyes for an instant, and then, another accidental glance being exchanged (for she always found him looking too), would withdraw them again in great haste, ashamed that he should see how proud she was of him, and yet prouder of him than ever, prouder than ever of herself for the tenderness and admiration that his face had expressed. And her loving pride made her appear so beautiful—beautiful with a beauty far transcending that which any of her flatterers had ever tried to persuade her of—that the next time she looked she would find his face expressing more tenderness and admiration still.

“You do not regret what happened last night?” he whispered at last on one of these occasions, but the lover-like pressure of her hand with which he accompanied the question showed that he asked it rather to make a joyful assurance doubly sure than in any doubt as to the reply.

“Regret!” she exclaimed, and turned towards him a look so beaming that any amount of doubt must have dissolved under it; then in

confusion she lowered her eyes again, and, partly to divert attention from herself, partly perhaps from a latent instinct of coquettishness, asked nervously: "And you—are you so very sorry then?"

She felt his arm steal round her for answer.

"Ah! my darling, if you only knew how happy I am—too happy almost, for I am afraid sometimes of wakening and finding it all a dream. Thank Heaven, I know it is true, but when I think of the difference between yesterday and to-day, I can hardly believe that such difference can be—yesterday a poor lonely wretch with no idea of being other than a poor lonely wretch all my life long, and to-day——" He did not finish the sentence, but folded his arm round her closer still.

"With no idea up to yesterday of—of anything else?" said Olivia after a moment's pause.

"Dear me, I am afraid it was very imprudent to make up your mind so suddenly."

The words were spoken in a tone of light raillery, but she was inwardly conscious of a slight sense of pique as she uttered them. Had he never thought of her then before yesterday?

And she had thought of him so many, many times.

Perhaps he divined something of what was passing in her mind, for he answered, apparently by way of explanation :

“I had made a resolution never to marry, and could not decide to break it till the very last. And I think I should have had strength to resist breaking it always, only that as I know I am not taking you away from a home of your own——”

“And supposing you had been taking me away from fifty homes?” put in Olivia, seeing that he came to an abrupt stop. “Have you such a mean opinion of yourself, such a mean opinion of me, as to think——”

“I—I mean that—that—living in India, you know,” he explained in some confusion, “it would be a sacrifice which I should have had no right——”

“But dear me, living in India is no such dreadful hardship,” said Olivia, still rather perplexed.

“I—I am obliged to live for months together in very wild places sometimes,” he went on,

gradually regaining his wonted manner, "and then I shall either have to leave you behind, or take you with me to some cramped little hut where you would have no single comfort that in England you have been accustomed to."

"I won't be left behind at all events," said Olivia energetically.

He repaid the promise with a tender caress.

"My own Olivia! I would not be so selfish, but that I know it will be the care of my whole life to make you happy, and I believe that I shall succeed."

She smiled gratefully, but did not answer. She was thinking what a far different home awaited them in reality from that to which he looked forward, and rejoiced over her wealth as she had never rejoiced yet. Ah! what happiness was hers—to be able to reward his disinterested love with lands and honours, and yet know all the time that it was disinterested, to be able to place in a station worthy of him the man whom she was so proud of, and who had been ready to share his all with her supposed poverty! How surprised he would be to find that he had not chosen a dowerless bride after

all, and what pleasure she would have in making the announcement—such pleasure that she felt half tempted to forestall it by telling him at once. But she had already sketched out a little programme of her own as to the mode in which he was to learn the truth, and, as this was neither the time nor place for putting it into execution, she resolved to keep her secret a while longer.

“You would much prefer England to India if it were not for your business, I suppose?” she said, following up the train of her own thoughts.

“I never shall live in England,” he answered gravely.

“No, because it is necessary that you should live abroad—I quite understand that. But if it were not necessary, you would prefer England, would you not?—just as I suppose you would prefer reading books or writing them to making railways and canals?”

“Oh! in that case of course—But I don’t by any means dislike my work, I can assure you.”

“And yet I should have thought it was not

at all the kind of work for which you were best suited naturally."

"So perhaps I should have thought myself once, but it was the only kind of work I could get to do at a time when I was obliged to do something, and of course I could not refuse it."

"You did not exactly choose it then?"

"Oh no! On my passage out from England I made acquaintance with a person who was on his way to India as an engineer, and as he was kind enough to offer me an opening, I accepted it. And now I have come to take an interest in the business for its own sake."

Olivia was once more silent, giving herself up to the contemplation of her own privileges. How pleasant to know that by her means he was to be released from work that was evidently only half congenial to him, and to exchange a life of exile and comparative drudgery for the ease and refined luxury of an English home! Again she felt tempted to confess the truth without further delay, but again on consideration could not bring herself to spoil the pleasure she anticipated from disclosing it later in her



own way. If only there was no danger of his being in the least degree annoyed with her afterwards for the concealment! But that was surely impossible; he could not grudge her a few hours' further possession of a secret which it gratified her to keep, and which after all was so infinitely inferior in importance to that other secret which she had allowed him to discover of her heart of hearts. Nevertheless she was disposed to find out, if she could, how far there was any possibility of her temporary reticence being distasteful to him.

"Is it not strange to think how much we seem to know of one another, and all the while how little we have heard of each other's history?" she said presently. "Why, you know absolutely nothing about me, except that you found me living with Mrs. Waters, and that my only relations are an uncle and aunt and cousins in Somersetshire, and yet——"

"I know as much about you as you know about me," he interposed somewhat hastily.

"But still wonderfully little when one comes to think of it. However, I suppose you feel about it much as I do, and that is, that when

I know *you* so well I don't care about the string of dates and names and dry facts which would represent you best to other people."

He did not speak for a few seconds, and then it was with a voice which showed how deeply this testimony of her love had moved him.

"Olivia! You can really put so much faith in me as that?"

"Can't you put as much in me, Harry?"

His only reply was a look of ineffable tenderness.

"You are not going then to be a dreadful jealous tyrant, always trying to find out my secrets, if I have any?" she went on.

"My own treasure! I have found out already that you are worthy of all love and all trust, and what do I care for finding out more?"

"Ah! then I see you really feel towards me as I feel towards you," she said, with a shy yet loving glance upwards. His face happened to be turned away, so that he did not see the glance, but his manner gave sufficient acknowledgment of the words which had accompanied it.

There was a momentary pause, and then,

with his face still averted, he asked in rather low tones :

“ You mean to say that if I had a secret to keep from you, you would love me all the same and trust me to keep it still ? ”

“ Ah ! would I not, Harry ? One secret or a thousand.”

He did not answer save by a long-drawn breath, but she knew by his very silence how glad he was made by this declaration of her confidence, and therefore of her love.

In the exchange of lover-like assurances such as these, and in discussions of a more practical but no less agreeable nature as to the arrangement of that future which they were henceforth to have in common, the pleasant morning walk was made to look very short. Thus, almost before they knew whither they were going, they found themselves at the door of the house which Olivia for the present called home, where, having made an appointment for another meeting later in the day when the relations between them should have been made known to Mrs. Waters and Emmy, they parted—Mr. Graham to return to his lodgings, Olivia to go upstairs

to her friends and give the best account of herself that she could.

She never knew exactly how she got through her task. Mrs. Waters, who fortunately was alone in the drawing-room when she entered it, began asking a multiplicity of questions—as to how she had passed the night, as to the state in which she had left Mrs. Griffiths, as to the effect of so much fatigue upon herself—and then somehow the conversation got round to Mr. Graham. And presently Olivia found herself sitting on the sofa with her hand fast locked in that of her friend, trembling and blushing and stammering in a manner utterly inconsistent with her supposed claims to superior strength of character, and giving up her confession piece-meal in reply to interrogations from which she shrank even while she invited them. At last, gradually and by dint of a great deal of cross-examination and hypothetical filling-up of hiatuses, Mrs. Waters was put in possession of the three great facts that Mr. Graham had said he loved Olivia, that Olivia loved Mr. Graham, and that the two were to be married as soon as might be.

Olivia was prepared to be warmly congratu-

lated, but she had hardly expected from a person so comparatively undemonstrative as Mrs. Waters usually was the display of affectionate tenderness with which her tidings were received. No sooner did Mrs. Waters fairly understand what had happened than she drew Olivia towards her with a fondness which took her by surprise even in the midst of her emotion.

“Dear, dear Olivia—” it was the first time that Mrs. Waters had ever called the heiress by her Christian name. “God bless you—God bless you both !”

“Dear Mrs. Waters !” responded Olivia gratefully ; “how kind and good you are ! more like a mother to me than anything else—or a sister I ought to say,” she added, bethinking herself that this was the most complimentary way of putting it.

A short silence ensued, and then Olivia spoke again.

“Then you quite approve of my choice ?” she asked with downcast eyes, but she put the question rather because she wanted to hear the praises of her betrothed than because she had really any doubt on the subject.

"Ah yes! Olivia—I am sure nobody could make a better one," answered Mrs. Waters, with even more warmth than her friend had expected. "So—so far as I know, of course I mean."

"And what you don't know of him I do," said Olivia proudly. "I know that he has chosen me believing me to be a poor governess with no home of my own, or chance of a home but through his generosity—I know that he is the most noble, disinterested——And that reminds me, dear Mrs. Waters, Egerton Park and all about it must be kept secret a little longer."

Mrs. Waters looked rather dismayed.

"What! does he not know yet——"

"No, and I don't intend him to know until we get to Chorcombe. I forgot to tell you; it is settled that he is to go with us to Chorcombe for a few days, only a few days for the present—at least so he thinks, but I hope the discovery of Egerton Park may make a difference. In the meantime he says he must return to India by this mail just as if—as if nothing had happened, you know; only he is going by Marseilles instead of

Southampton, and that will give him a little more time. So you will ask him to stay two or three days at the Laurels, won't you, Mrs. Waters dear? he thinks I am to be at the Laurels too."

"But have you really not told him yet? Oh! Olivia—Miss Egerton—I am afraid——"

"Why, what is there to be afraid of? If he thought I was good enough for him when I was a poor dependent he won't change his opinion when I am a rich lady, surely? If it had been the other way indeed, and he had been another man——But at all events you won't betray me now that the mischief is done and can't be undone?"

"Oh! of course I will do just what you wish," said Mrs. Waters with a feeble smile, but in spite of the smile she still looked so uncomfortable that Olivia was quite puzzled.

But Olivia had soon something else to think of. Emmy came into the room at this juncture, and it was necessary that the event of the day should be made known to her also.

When her mother told her that Miss Egerton was engaged to Mr. Graham, Emmy looked

more surprised than ever she had looked in her life before. She was so much surprised that it was some time before she recovered herself sufficiently to offer her congratulations to Miss Egerton as in duty bound. And somehow, when she did offer them, though she tried to make them as cordial as possible, she was aware that she did not succeed nearly so well as she would have done if Miss Egerton's choice had fallen on almost anybody else. The fact was, she had never quite got over her original prejudice against Mr. Graham.

And yet it was surely very foolish to harbour any remnant of that prejudice now, and so she acknowledged to herself when she came to think the thing over. She had only had one reason for ever feeling the faintest distrust of Mr. Graham, whom personally she liked rather than otherwise; and that reason was founded on a suspicion the groundlessness of which she might now regard as all but absolutely demonstrated. Miss Egerton was going to marry him, and certainly her mother would not stand by silently to see her unsuspecting friend united to a felon—not if he were ten times her brother. So



there was obviously an end of the matter, and the sooner all recollection of her silly prejudice was got rid of the better.

Thus Emmy concluded, but in spite of her conclusion she could not help feeling rather curious to see whether her father would be as willing to extend hospitality to the stranger as her mother had been.

## CHAPTER IV.

*The New Home.*

ON the afternoon of the following day three ladies and a gentleman alighted on the platform of the rustic little railway station which gave Chorcombe a right to consider itself part of the great system of European civilization. The travellers had left Nidbourne that morning, and were no other than Mrs. Waters and Emmy, Miss Egerton and Mr. Graham, the last of whom had been duly invited to spend a few days at the Laurels according to Olivia's proposal.

Immediately on leaving the train both Mrs. Waters and her daughter looked round with a half expectation that Austin might be waiting to receive them. They soon saw that this was not the case, but before they had time to feel

disappointment a very tall footman with powdered head and large white calves advanced with every mark of profound respect to inquire if the ladies were Mrs. and Miss Waters. They duly answered the question, though in considerable astonishment, when, to their infinitely greater astonishment, he instantly possessed himself of their cloaks and travelling-bags with the explanation :

“I will put them in the carriage, madam.”

And, looking the way which he seemed to indicate, they saw, just outside the station door, a gorgeously panelled open carriage, drawn by a couple of bright bays with proudly arched necks and glossy coats that seemed to fling back the sunshine. As this splendid vision burst on Emmy's gaze she could hardly persuade herself that it was not all a dream.

But it was no dream, and, following the obsequious footman with the cloaks, all four travellers went forward, and had presently taken their places in that sumptuous equipage in as matter-of-course a style as though none of them had ever been accustomed to anything meaner. All four travellers, for, by private compact with

her friends, Olivia, instead of going straight to Egerton House, was to accompany them home to dinner at the Laurels, where Austin had that morning been informed by a letter from his wife both of Miss Egerton's incognito and the reason for it.

Who shall say with what feelings Emmy leaned back on the cushioned seat of the carriage—her own carriage, or at least the carriage which ever hereafter was to be at her command?—who shall say with what new balminess the breeze played upon her cheek, with what new radiance the sun lighted up everything on which her eyes fell? As she found herself borne in luxurious motion through the streets of her native place she could hardly believe that they were the same which she had known formerly, so unfamiliar did they appear as seen from her present unaccustomed elevation. Perhaps it was something more than the mere change of material point of view which made them look so strange, for she had driven through them once or twice in Miss Egerton's carriage without observing any particular difference, but it did not occur to her to make this reflection

now—she could only marvel, without trying to account for it, at the alteration which seemed to be in all things and all people. Nowhere did this alteration strike her so much as in the part of the village which she knew best—the street where she had been born, and where she had lived all her life until within the last few weeks. As she recognized the shabby little house which had been her home so long, she could hardly believe that it was the same, could hardly imagine it possible that she and those belonging to her had really lived in such a place—a place of which she felt so ashamed that she fervently hoped its history might be unknown to the magnificent footman behind, and the no less magnificent coachman in front. And yet, as she could not help remembering with a pang of something like self-reproach, she had been very happy in that place sometimes—in those far-off days (how far-off they looked now!) when she and her mother sat sewing at the window on sunny afternoons, and sometimes on half-holidays would see——

Why, who was this coming round the corner? Was it—yes—no—yes, it was—and he saw her


—he was bowing—and of course she too—— And Emmy made a little inclination of the head to a person who was just then raising his hat towards the carriage, and whom in another moment the flying wheels had borne her swiftly past.

Yes, actually that had been John Thwaites. Dear me! Emmy glanced round at the three other occupants of the carriage, and, finding that they were all busy with their own talk in evident ignorance of the encounter, she heaved a slight sigh behind her parasol. Poor John Thwaites! She could fancy he looked a little paler and thinner than he used to do—ah! she knew what that would be owing to. And what a depressed melancholy look there had been in his eyes as the carriage went whirling past him!—yes, the carriage must have reminded him anew of the distance that separated her—ah well!—and she sighed again. For of course he must have known it was their own carriage; he could never be so stupid as to think anything else, surely. Unless indeed he might have taken it into his head that it was Miss Egerton's, as she was with them—it was very provoking really

that Miss Egerton had not ordered her own carriage like other people. But then it was quite impossible he could have made so silly a mistake. Dear, dear! to think of meeting him for the first time for so long, and under such circumstances too! It was very strange—so strange that Emmy could do nothing else than ponder on it all the rest of the way.

They had passed through the village, and had gone some little distance beyond it, when she was roused at last by the stopping of the carriage before a handsome gate, belonging, as she knew, to the house which in the meantime was to be her home. As the gate swung back on its hinges to admit them, disclosing the hitherto unknown land beyond, she looked up with new interest in external objects, while John Thwaites once more retreated far into the back-ground.

It was a handsome place this temporary new home of hers—quite handsome enough to distract the thoughts of one so little accustomed to grandeur as Emmy. A broad gravelled carriage sweep, with shrubs and flower-beds on one hand and a spacious lawn on the other, led



up to the house—a white-stuccoed, dashing-looking dwelling of the kind described in Mr. Jupp's list as a Very Superior Gentlemanly Villa Residence. As the carriage wheels sounded on the gravel, the door of the house was thrown open, and Emmy, looking eagerly towards it for her father, saw, not him, but another resplendent creature with powdered head and large white calves, and three or four smart maid-servants clustering behind. No wonder indeed if she felt very much elated.

She was so much elated that she forgot to look again for her father, until, having been duly assisted to alight, she stood with her fellow-travellers in the handsomely proportioned hall.

"Papa is quite well, I hope?" she asked one of the white-headed footmen as she gazed round in wondering admiration, with which some surprise at her father's absence now began to be mingled.

"Master is quite well, thank you, miss. Master is in the library, I believe."

Emmy was just going to ask where the library was when a dark-grained door painted



in imitation oak was slowly opened, and Austin Waters appeared on the threshold.

He stood looking at the group with a doubtful, almost bewildered, air, and without seeming to observe Emmy, till, unable to restrain her impatience, she made a step forward and threw herself on his neck.

"Good child, good child," he muttered, holding her for a moment in his arms; then, releasing her, he advanced to bid welcome to the rest.

Mr. Graham was standing a little apart from the others, but, somewhat to Emmy's surprise, her father went up to him first.

"How do you do, Mr. Graham?" but Emmy observed in his manner a singular want of his accustomed geniality.

The host and guest shook hands, and Emmy expected that her father would immediately turn to greet Mrs. Waters and Olivia. But he still remained standing before Mr. Graham, almost as though he had no eyes for anybody else.

"I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

"Very pleasant indeed. Oh! Mrs. Waters, I beg your pardon."

With this Mr. Graham stepped aside to make way for his hostess, and Austin, thus reminded, went forward and pressed his lips on his wife's cheek, after which he turned to give a welcome to Miss Egerton. Then he looked towards Mr. Graham again, and stood silent, with something of the same bewildered air as before.

"I am really very glad you have had a pleasant journey," he said at last.

Mr. Graham again declared that he had enjoyed the journey very much, and then there was another constrained pause. It was evident to Emmy that her father, though not willing to wound his guest's feelings by open neglect, was not altogether at ease with him.

"Shall I show the gentleman up to his room, sir?" asked one of the footmen, coming opportunely to the rescue.

"Ah yes! to be sure," said Austin, rousing himself. "Shall they show you up to your room, Mr. Graham? let me see, it only wants about three-quarters of an hour to dinner-time."

Mr. Graham acquiesced, and as Mrs. Waters (in whose manner also a shade of constraint had

been visible) turned to Olivia and said that they had better be thinking of going upstairs too, the little assembly was quickly broken up. Emmy, however, still remained below. She wanted to exchange further greetings with her father, and perhaps she was not averse to the idea of finding out, if she could, something about Mr. Graham. But even the subject of Mr. Graham waned in interest as she looked round at the glories of her new home.

"Oh! papa," she exclaimed, following him into the Turkey-carpeted room called the library, "how lovely everything is! how——"

She stopped short, a little disconcerted, for she had just discovered that they were not alone. At a table covered with papers in the middle of the room, there sat busily writing a dapper rosy-cheeked personage, whom a second look showed her to be Mr. Tovey the architect.

He rose immediately on seeing the young lady of the house, and bowed with much courteous gallantry of manner.

"Miss Waters! Allow me to congratulate you on your return. You were pleased with Nidbourne, I hope?—ah! so glad that my hum-

ble recommendation proved satisfactory. I need not ask if you found the sea-breezes beneficial, for upon my word——” and he rounded off the sentence with another bow of extra politeness. “And might I ask how you find things looking down here, Miss Waters? The arrangements of the house and grounds—considering, you know, that they are only to subserve a temporary purpose—I hope they meet your approbation?”

“Yes, everything is very nice indeed,” said Emmy, looking round with the air of temperate admiration which she felt it incumbent on her to assume in the presence of a stranger, even though a stranger so much behind the scenes as Mr. Tovey. “What a pretty room this is—the library, I think?”

“Ah yes! pretty enough,” said Mr. Tovey lightly, “pretty enough. But no more to be compared with the library we are going to give you at Chorcombe Lodge, Miss Waters——ah! no more than chalk to cheese, is it now, sir?”

“Oh! certainly not,” said Austin, shaking himself out of a brief fit of abstraction. “Yes,

I think we are making a very neat job of that library, Mr. Tovey."

"Yes, and what's more, sir, we are making a neat job of the whole house, from cellar to garret," rejoined Mr. Tovey enthusiastically. "Ah! Miss Waters, I do promise myself a treat in showing you over that house when it is sufficiently advanced, I do indeed. In my opinion it will be quite one of the half-dozen finest places in the county."

"The largest room is to be more than a hundred feet long," put in Austin, catching some of Mr. Tovey's fire, and speaking more like himself than Emmy had yet heard him speak that day. "More than a hundred feet long, only think of that! and lighted by three magnificent chandeliers which I am going to get made on purpose. That is to be for extra occasions, of course, such as a ball or a very large dinner party, but for ordinary use we shall have eight smaller reception-rooms, all equally——"

"And when is it all to be finished, papa?" delightedly interrupted Emmy, laying aside her dignity in her impatience to realise visions of so much magnificence.

"Mr. Tovey thinks we shall perhaps be able to move into it in the course of next winter."

"Next winter!" cried Emmy, looking rather blank.

"There is a very great deal to be done," said Mr. Tovey blandly. "The furnishing alone, you know——"

"Ah yes! the furnishing, to be sure," said Emmy with a resigned sigh. "And will it keep you as busy all the time, papa, as it has done for the last six weeks? because, if it does, that will be very tiresome. We were dreadfully disappointed that you could not come down to us for a few days—the sea-side was so beautiful, and would have done you so much good. Why didn't you come, papa?"

"I assure you it would really have been impossible. We have been so very busy all the time, have we not, Mr. Tovey?"

"I don't see what there is to keep you so *very* busy," pouted Emmy. "And it is my belief, papa, you wanted a change more than we did. I declare you are looking quite pale and thin."

"Oh! that is nothing, nothing—a little wor-

ried to-day, that's all—there, we won't say any more about it ; I am all right again now. And so you don't understand what there is to keep me so very busy, you were saying. Shall I tell you something, Emmy?"

"Oh ! papa, what?" said Emmy excitedly, a certain mysteriousness in her father's manner arousing all her curiosity.

"I have news for you, Emmy. I wouldn't write anything about it because I wanted to surprise you when you came home. What do you think, child ? I will give you three guesses if you like—but it is no good, you would never find out. I have bought the Beacon Bay estate."

"The Beacon Bay estate, papa?"

"Yes, child, the Beacon Bay estate. So the harbour and the pier and the wharfs and all the new town that will spring up—to say nothing, of course, of the fashionable hotels and lodging-houses at the west end—everything will be my property. What do you think of that?"

"It is quite true, Miss Waters," said Mr. Tovey, answering Emmy's look of astonishment. "In a few years your father will be

the richest man in Great Britain, or if not quite the richest (for I don't like to exaggerate), among the two or three richest men—or the half-dozen richest, say.”

“In a few years, Mr. Tovey!” repeated Austin with a slight touch of discontent in his voice.

“Yes, but in a few months, you know——”

“In a few months the thing will virtually be done,” agreed Mr. Tovey. “In a few months the railway will have been definitely decided on, and your interest in the property will be worth almost any money.”

“And mind you, Emmy, the railway is as good as made already,” interposed Austin eagerly. “Not the slightest danger on that score, is there, Mr. Tovey?”

“Danger!” echoed Mr. Tovey, with all the genuine ardour of a sanguine temperament. “With such a strong party as there is on the Board, I should like to see how there can be danger.”

“Of course, of course, just what I say myself. Well, Emmy, you know now what has been making me so busy, and what do you think of it? Better to be a little tied for the present, for



the sake of coming out so splendidly as that, eh? Duty first and pleasure afterwards—yes, that's the way to look at it."

"Oh! decidedly, papa," assented Emmy cordially. "And when once the railway is made——"

"When once the railway is made we shall have nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves. By that time the town will be half laid out, and——But I haven't shown you the plans yet; look here"—and, drawing forth some huge sheets of paper from the mass of documents on the table, Austin proceeded to display them before his daughter's amazed eyes. "Let me see, which is this? oh yes! 'Bird's-eye View of Waterston'—Waterston is to be the name of the new town, you know—aha! what do you say to that? This is just to give a general idea of the place, you perceive—with the pier and harbour at the east, and the parade and fashionable terraces to the west, and a broad handsome street running across to connect them—Agnes Street, and another street a trifle narrower behind that again—Emily Street. Do you like it, eh? And then here is 'Marine

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Parade, Waterston,' and here is 'Plan of New Church, Waterston,' and here is 'Design for Royal Crescent and Royal Hotel, Waterston'—hotel in the middle, you see, and crescent curving round on each side. A beautiful effect that crescent will have, to be sure—I was over yesterday to look at them digging the foundations."

"What! papa, they have actually begun already?"

"Only just on the Crescent for the present. You see it is a great point to have some decent accommodation ready for visitors by the time the railway is finished, so as to be beforehand with all neighbouring proprietors, and, as Mr. Tovey says, bricks and mortar never run away. Well, you will give your blessing to the new town, won't you, Emmy?"

"Oh! papa, what a charming new town it will be!" cried Emmy enthusiastically, her excitement quite causing her to forget the restraint of Mr. Tovey's presence. "What a beautiful place they are going to make of it! and what a capital idea to call it Waterston! and how funny it will be to hear the word from other people, and yet so pleasant all the time too!"

It sounds quite like the name of a place that a lord might take his title from, doesn't it now, papa?"

There is no knowing how much longer Emmy might have gone on had she not just then been interrupted by the deep stroke of a gong that sounded through the house.

"That means that you have just half-an-hour to dress for dinner," said her father, with an affectionate smile which showed how much her expressions of approval had gratified him. "So perhaps you had better run upstairs to your room—I will ring for somebody to point it out to you—and Mr. Tovey and I will try to finish a little calculation we are making here. Good-bye, child; I am so glad you are pleased, but indeed I knew you would be."

Thus dismissed, with the further tribute of a loving squeeze of the hand from her father and a profound bow from Mr. Tovey, Emmy left the room, and went up the broad stone staircase, preceded by a lady-like lady's-maid in black silk and lavender-coloured ribbons to show her the way. She felt like a queen going to her tiring-room.

## CHAPTER V.

*“ All of this is mine and thine.”*

THE dinner that day was very sumptuous and very grand, very formal and very stiff. Nor was the stiffness altogether owing to the impressiveness of solid plate and best cut glass, or even to the awful presence of the two white-headed footmen, moving noiselessly about the room with the solemnity of officiating priests. These causes doubtless counted for something in the general effect, but more oppressive than any of them was a certain unwonted frigidity and constraint visible in the manner of the master of the house, and more especially visible when he addressed his guest Mr. Graham. Not that he had any apparent intention of treating Mr. Graham with coldness or disrespect. On the contrary, he was constantly turning to speak to

him, to the neglect of every one else at table, but this very civility only brought all that there was of peculiar in his manner into increased relief. Emmy, taking attentive note of everything, could not but come to the conclusion that her father, though ready to make an effort for the sake of hospitality, was by no means so glad to see Mr. Graham as her mother had been.

The dinner was got through rather quickly in spite of the variety of the courses, nor did the gentlemen needlessly prolong it by sitting over their wine. As soon as the stage of dessert was reached, Austin rose, saying that he must go to look after the builders at Chorcombe Lodge, and begging Mr. Graham to excuse him. This Mr. Graham was probably willing enough to do, he and Olivia having arranged to take an after-dinner walk, on which they were thus set free to start without further delay.

The declining sun was still some way above the horizon when they left the house, shedding a soft golden glow on the surrounding expanse of fields, and lending new transparency to the tender green leaves amid which the birds might be heard twittering their evening song. Every-

thing was looking very beautiful, and doubly beautiful to the lovers, who now for the first time that day found themselves alone.

"Which way shall we take?" said Olivia, as the garden-gate of the Laurels swung behind them, and they looked round at the prospect of open smiling country which spread itself on either hand.

"You must be my guide, Olivia; you know the place and I don't. Perhaps across those fields and down to that brook——"

"Oh yes! very pretty, but it does not lead anywhere in particular. I think if we went up the road towards where you see those trees——"

And Olivia pointed to a large mass of trees at some distance, where the sunlight, gilding the rippling foliage of the topmost boughs, threw into bold relief the dark wall of trunks and branches underneath.

"Very well; it is all the same to me, of course."

It was all the same to him in very truth. There was only one thing this evening he cared about, and that was the companionship of Olivia.

Otherwise he might still have thought that the fields leading down to the brook looked more tempting than the dusty road.

They went along that same dusty road half a mile or more (only they never noticed whether it was dusty or not), and then, having turned into another road which made an angle with it, they found themselves walking under the shadow of the trees pointed out by Olivia, and now only separated from them by a high stone wall.

"They are fine trees, are they not?" said Olivia, availing herself of a momentary pause in a conversation which to Mr. Graham had been so all-engrossing that he had had no eyes for trees or anything else except Olivia's face. "They belong to a private park."

"Oh indeed!" said Mr. Graham, with as little interest as it was possible for him to feel in any remark made by his betrothed.

"Yes," said Olivia faintly, for she was afraid that he might inquire whose park it was. But the question never occurred to him.

They went a few yards in silence, and then Olivia, still speaking rather faintly, resumed:

"Suppose we go in and look at the grounds? They are free to any respectable person."

"I think it would be almost better to keep to the open country," said Mr. Graham, who did not like the idea of his delicious *tête-à-tête* with Olivia being interrupted by a parley with a gate-keeper or gardener. "I don't care for places where one is only admitted on sufferance."

"Oh! but indeed you need have no feeling of that sort here. The people at the lodges know me quite well; Emmy and I wander about under the trees all day sometimes. And really I should like you to see the grounds; they are considered very pretty."

"Oh! by all means, then," said Mr. Graham, to whom the matter was after all one of nearly complete indifference.

In a few seconds more they came to a place where there was a break in the high stone wall, and where, on the other side of a handsome iron gate, there was visible a pretty little cottage, evidently a gardener's house or porter's lodge, with a well-kept carriage road winding upwards through an avenue of trees.



"This is one of the entrances," said Olivia, and she put her arm through the rails of a little side-gate, which was a kind of supplement to the larger one; then, lifting an inside latch with all the dexterity of a practised hand, she stepped quickly across the threshold. As she held the gate open for Mr. Graham, a man appeared at the door of the little house, who immediately pulled off his cap, and hurried forward to assist. She motioned him back, however, with a wave of her hand.

"Ah! how do you do, Hopkins? No, thank you, don't trouble yourself. This way if you please" (the last words were spoken to Mr. Graham). "You see I am very well known here, as I told you."

And the lovers passed together under the thickest shadow of the trees, while the man retreated into his house.

"I hope you like these dear old trees, Harry?" asked Olivia, slipping her arm within that of her betrothed. "I do so want you to like whatever I like, you know."

"They are magnificent trees, certainly," he said, rousing himself to take an interest in the

scene, and looking round with genuine admiration. And indeed it would have been impossible to look round and not feel admiration at the sight of those stately moss-grown trunks, hoary and gnarled with age below, and yet above decked with a fresh crown of new leaves which, flickering against the pale gold-tinted azure of the evening sky, seemed to bear witness to perpetual youth.

"I may have grown a little wiser with time," said Olivia, raising her eyes watchfully to his face as she spoke, "but I used to fancy that people who owned a place like this, people who had the right of walking under their own trees at any hour of the day or night they pleased, were so privileged and ought to be so happy! What do you think about it?"

"Well, they possess an element of happiness, there is no denying, though not an indispensable one by any means."

"Oh no!" said Olivia, "not indispensable, of course."

"No, for there is only one indispensable element of happiness in the world—only one to me at least, and that——" With this he looked


straight into Olivia's eyes, and said something which made her blush very much, but which, as it was supremely uninteresting to anybody but themselves, need not be here reported. For some time they walked on, and Olivia was not able, or perhaps did not particularly try, to turn the conversation to more rational subjects.

But though she did not lose a word of what he was saying, she managed so to shape the direction of their walk that, emerging presently from the trees, they came to a pause in sight of a long range of grey stone building which, situated on the top of a gentle incline, seemed to dominate the rest of the park, and still glowed in the light of the setting sun.

"That is the house," said Olivia.

"Had we not better turn?" suggested Mr. Graham, who did not wish to leave the shelter of the friendly trees.

"Oh no! I should like you to look for a little while. We are doing no harm, I can assure you; the owner has been away from home for some time, and has not yet returned. Well, what do you think of it?"



"It is a very fine old house indeed."


"There is a little bit that dates back from the reign of Edward the Third—a very little bit, but still better than nothing. The place was almost entirely rebuilt at the end of the seventeenth century, and then there was an addition forty or fifty years ago. But I like to think of that little bit from the reign of Edward the Third; it has been so repaired and restored that I hardly know where to look for it, but wherever it may be it gives a sort of charm—Ah! you think me very foolish, I dare say."

"No, I don't. I look on the place with more respect myself in consequence of it."

"You do? And the house is a very nice comfortable one inside—one of the most comfortable in the county, so at least everybody says."

"I am sure it must be. It is about the finest old country house I have ever seen."

"You really think so?" said Olivia, looking up with a slightly flushed face. She paused and looked down again, then asked in somewhat tremulous tones: "Do you think you would like to live in such a house as that?"



"I am afraid it is not much use to think about it."

"Well, but just make an effort of imagination for a minute. Suppose you lived in England, and suppose you were very rich, would you approve of that particular house as a home?"

"I could approve of no home without you, Olivia."

"Ah! but my company must be part of the supposition, of course; you must never leave me out of your calculations now. Well, under these circumstances would you approve of it?"

"Under these circumstances I should think it the very perfection of a home."

Again Olivia's face flushed, and for a moment she was mute with sheer happiness.

"Shall we go a little nearer?" she said presently, and began to move forward as she spoke.

Her arm was resting on that of her lover, and of course he moved forward too. But though he could not resist the gentle force that guided him in the direction of the house, though indeed he allowed himself to be thus guided for some

way in silence, it was not the direction he would have chosen. He wanted to be alone with Olivia, and not in full view of the windows of a large country house.

"Have we not gone far enough?" he asked at last, seeing that she still went on without any sign of coming to a halt. "I think you must be mistaken about the family being from home, you see the windows are all open."

"I suppose the owner's return is expected very soon, and they are getting things ready, but I am sure it has not taken place yet. Pray let us go on a little further; I should like you to see as much as you can."

They went on accordingly—walking remorselessly across the smooth green turf which was evidently the pride of the gardener's heart, but Olivia said it did not signify—went on till they were only separated from the house by a narrow strip of flower-garden. Then Olivia said :

"I think we must go in and look at some of the rooms. I know the housekeeper quite well; there will not be the slightest difficulty. Really the place is well worth seeing, and there is a view from the drawing-room windows——"

"The view can be no better than what we see here for ourselves, and as for the rooms I can imagine them. It is very kind of you, dearest, but I think——"


"Oh! but please do come, Harry. I really wish you to see."

Thus saying, she disengaged her arm, and set herself to undo the fastening of a little gate opening into the garden, which she forthwith entered. Mr. Graham of course had no choice but to follow.

She stepped briskly across the garden to a small glass-panelled door, the handle of which she turned without the ceremony of even a preliminary tap.

"The principal entrance is round at the other side, but we shall find this way the quietest. Come, Harry—no, you need not be afraid; I can assure you there is no danger of anybody making the slightest objection."

Again he had no choice but to follow, and she led the way quickly through a succession of corridors till at last they found themselves in a spacious hall at the foot of what seemed to be the principal staircase. As they drew near



they saw, crossing the hall towards the staircase, a spruce maid-servant.

"Oh ma'am!" exclaimed the girl, starting as she caught sight of Olivia, and then she dropped a profound curtsy.

"Good evening, Jane. You need not trouble yourself to wait—I am only showing the gentleman something of the house. There is no one in the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"No one, ma'am."

"Then this is the way, Mr. Graham."

And with these words Olivia went across the hall, and, throwing open a door, ushered her lover into a large and handsomely furnished room, with long windows looking on the flower-garden and park beyond.

"This is the drawing-room, Harry. How do you like it?"

"It is very splendid. Yes, indeed the house is well worth seeing, especially as you have been able to give me a sight of it with so little trouble. And this is the view you told me of?"

He went up to one of the windows. Olivia followed him, and for a while the two stood together looking at the prospect without. It was



a beautiful prospect at all times—the downward-sloping sward, the groups of old trunks and wide-spreading branches, and a glimpse of open country showing itself at the end of a long vista formed by a break in the trees just opposite the house—more beautiful than ever as seen now in the quiet evening light, with the crimson flush of sunset still lingering on the horizon.

“I am glad you like the place,” said Olivia, speaking for the first time after a long silence.


“Like the place! everybody must like such a place as this.”

Again Olivia was silent, then, looking on the floor, she remarked in rather a low husky voice:

“You have never asked me yet anything about the owner.”

“Have I not? I suppose because the only thing it concerned me to know about him was whether he was at home or not, and you have told me that already. Who is it then?”

“I told you a little while ago that he was not at home,” said Olivia, evading the question and beginning to tremble violently, “because it was true then. But it would not be true now.”



"Why, Olivia, what can you mean?"

She laid her hand gently on his shoulder, and, looking very intently at the floor, whispered:

"I mean, dear Harry, that you are the owner. You, for all that is yours is mine and all that is mine is yours. Do you understand?"

She lifted her eyes timidly to his face. He was gazing at her with a look half startled, half perplexed, and she went on to explain, with eyes once more cast down:

"Yes, dear Harry, you chose me thinking I was poor and friendless, and oh! how proud and grateful you have made me by that choice no words of mine can ever tell. But I was not poor, Harry, though friendless enough, Heaven knows. This is Egerton Park, and Egerton Park was all mine, and now it shall be all yours, and this is the new owner's welcome."

And, with an instinctive endeavour to make him forget by greater deference that he was the receiver and she the giver, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips. As she did so she found that it was cold as marble.

"Harry!" she cried in sudden alarm, "you are not angry with me, surely? I ought to

have told you sooner perhaps, but I took a childish pleasure in the idea of surprising you. Oh! why won't you speak to me? why do you look so strange?"

There was an expression of pain on his face which she had never seen there before, nor even imagined possible.


"Are you angry with me, Harry?"

"Angry!" and his eyes rested on her with a look of such unutterable tenderness that she was relieved of all her worst fears forthwith. "But if I had known—if I had only known in time——"

"You would never have spoken to me—yes, I am sure of that. And I can never be thankful enough that you did not know in time—never, never."

She looked up with a smile half arch, half loving. But he did not smile back again, only gazed straight into space with the same expression of pain as before.

"Oh! Harry, do you care for me so little, then? I would have taken anything from you and never felt ashamed of it; is your love for me so much less?"



Again the look of tenderness came into his eyes, and she knew that his love was not in fault.

"Why should you grudge to be made rich by me, Harry?"

He hesitated for an instant as though bewildered, then answered stammering, while the blood rushed to his forehead :

"I—I have so little to give in return, you know."

"Ah! how proud you are! how proud and how unkind! And you are going to give me a great deal—infinite treasures. You are going to give me your name——oh! you cruel Harry!" she expostulated, as he drew back with a shrinking movement which showed how little her arguments availed with him.

He did not answer, and she went on :

"And you are going to give me your love—or rather you have given it me already, and surely you are not going to take it away again and break my heart?"

He caught her in his arms, and covered her cheek with kisses.

"Ah yes! you have my love! you have my

love! and will have it while my life lasts."

"Then you are not going to give me up just because I am Miss Egerton of Egerton Park?" she asked as soon as she was released, trying to hide her blushes under an affectation of sportiveness.

"Give you up! I could not," he answered with passionate, almost defiant, vehemence. "I could not."

"Why then," said Olivia, "I love Egerton Park as I have never loved it yet. But mind, Harry, it is for your sake I love it so, not for its own. I would a thousand times sooner live and die with you in a log-hut in India or America, or where you pleased, than be left to live and die by myself here."

"You would!" he cried eagerly.

"To be sure I would. But to live and die with you in Egerton Park is best of all. Dear Egerton Park! I never thought to be so fond of it."

"Ah yes! you like Egerton Park best, of course. To be sure it is only natural that you should."

There was something in his voice which con-

veyed to Olivia's ear a slight suggestion of disappointment.

"Would you prefer that our home should be in India?" she asked him. "Because if you have any real reason for wishing to live there rather than here——"

"I do not think I have—any real reason," he said slowly as she paused for a reply. "No," he added dreamily, almost as though he were answering his own thoughts, "there can be no reason except mere feeling."

"Ah yes! I see—the feeling of being so proud that you do not like to take the least little thing from me, but that is a reason I will not recognise for an instant. So you will be content with Egerton Park, won't you, Harry? You know you told me just now it looked the very perfection of a home. And I will try so hard to make you happy in it—ah! you can't think how hard I will try."

"My own dearest! And to make you as happy as you will make me shall be the business of my life."

The compact thus made was sealed as all lovers' compacts are, and then for some time

they stood hand locked in hand, and silently watched the crimson streaks fade on the horizon. The hearts of both were filled with gladness—the hearts of both, in spite of a certain shade of trouble by which Mr. Graham's brow was still clouded.

Presently Olivia remembered that there yet existed a disturbing element in her joy, and turned round to ask :

“You will be able to arrange everything without going back to India, won't you, Harry?”

He shook his head sadly.

“It is impossible, my darling. My partners are depending on me for plans of a work for which they have already accepted a contract, and now that I have seen my models I must return without delay—I cannot even put off my journey for another mail. My own love, don't look so vexed—the sooner I go the sooner I shall return.”

“And when will you return?” she asked in a voice half choked by disappointment.

He considered for a moment, and answered sorrowfully :


“It cannot be for some months—perhaps not

this year at all. I shall first have to see this new work put into train, and then wind up the partnership——But what I can do I will do, you know that."

"You will actually have to leave me in three days, Harry? And for such a long time too?"

"The time will pass quickly, little one, or at least it will seem to have passed quickly when it is over. And when it is over, when once I am with you again, I will be with you always, and we will never, never part more. Is not that a future worth looking forward to?"

She smiled through her tears, and acknowledged that it was. And then they began talking of that happy future, and of how they would spend it, until gradually the troubles of the present became all but blotted out from their remembrance. As they sat there in the gathering dusk, each listening to the sound of the other's voice, Olivia scarcely thought of the impending separation, and Mr. Graham nearly forgot that there was such a property as Egerton Park in the world.





## CHAPTER VI.

*Mr. Mossman's Lawyer.*

AUSTIN'S visit to the works at Chorcombe Lodge was a very short one that afternoon. He had a great deal to say to his wife and daughter, neither of whom he had yet had an opportunity of seeing except in the presence of strangers; and as soon as he judged that due time had been allowed for Mr. Graham and Olivia to have started on their walk, he took his way back to the Laurels.

He found the two ladies alone together in the library, whither Emmy had taken her mother to show her Mr. Tovey's designs for the future city of Waterston. Emmy was in great glee, expatiating on the splendour of the family prospects with a fluency which even for her was unwonted, but Mrs. Waters seemed to take it

all very soberly; though, when she heard that the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate was definitively made, she did not fail to congratulate her husband on his acquisition.

It was long before this subject was anything like exhausted, but at last it had been sufficiently discussed for Emmy to bethink herself that the time was ripe for hazarding a few remarks on Mr. Graham. The dryness of her father's answers, however, soon showed her that this was a topic on which he was not nearly so ready to be discursive as on the other.

"Well, papa, and what do you think of Miss Egerton's engagement? Was there ever anything so romantic? That he should have taken her all the time for a governess, only fancy!"

"Ah yes! very curious indeed."

"And so suddenly as it was made up too; I was never so surprised in my life as when mamma told me. After such a short acquaintance—why, it seems only yesterday that we saw him first. But you and mamma have known him for a long time, have you not?"

"Yes—some time, that is—oh yes!"

"But how strange it is, papa, isn't it, to think

I never should have heard you speak of him before ! And I am quite sure I never did."

"Did you not—ah ! well—perhaps ; people can't be always talking about everybody they know. Let me see—plan No 4"—here he fumbled among the papers on the table. "And so you found Nidbourne a very pretty place ?"

This was evidently all that was to be got out of her father for the present, and after a few commonplaces about the beauties of Nidbourne, Emmy, not without a slight feeling of pique, went upstairs to superintend the unpacking of her boxes.

Emmy would have been more piqued still could she have known that the reticence which her father had shown on the subject of Mr. Graham in her presence was laid aside instantly on her departure. No sooner was he alone with his wife than he raised his eyes from his papers, and said :

"And when he is married to Miss Egerton I suppose he will live at Egerton House ?"

"I suppose so—yes, it will be their principal home, of course," said Mrs. Waters placidly.

He bit his lip, and once more busied himself

with his papers. Then again he looked up and said :

“ Is it not a great pity ?”

“ What is a pity, Austin ?”

“ That he should be living in the neighbourhood, you know. Yes, upon my word, the more I think of it—so very inconvenient—I wonder you did not try to prevent it, Agnes; you must have seen something of what was going on, and if you had just taken a little pains to keep them apart——”

“ Would you grudge him his happiness for a mere matter of convenience ?” asked Mrs. Waters, and in her voice was a touch of bitterness very unusual with her.

“ No, no, how you talk ! only for his sake as well as ours it seems such a risk——Egerton House of all places in the world ! Oh ! I know what you are going to say ; he will be very careful of course, and so shall we, and after so many years I dare say it is quite ridiculous to be so nervous. Only you must remember that we are not nobodies any more now, but as I may say the observed of all observers, and if he were to be in the least imprudent——”

"You need not be afraid," said Mrs. Waters, and the same touch of bitterness was still audible in her voice. "If he were inclined to be imprudent, you would have found it out before now."

"True, very true. Oh yes! it is quite absurd of me of course—I know very well there is not the slightest danger."

He relapsed into silence with the air of one convinced of his own mistake, and for a while there was nothing said on either side. At last Mrs. Waters spoke again, this time in the gentle tones natural to her.

"You will pay him what you owe before he goes away again, won't you, dear?"

He shifted uneasily on his chair, and his cheeks flushed a little.

"I don't know exactly—I think——Is it any great object with him to have the money immediately?"

"I don't suppose it is; at least he has never said anything about it. But I should like him to have it for all that, please, Austin; I could not bear to think that there should be any further delay."

"Yes, but if I pay him interest, it will positively be better for him to leave the money a little longer in my hands."

"Why should you not wish to pay it at once, dear?"

"Why?—Oh! well, the fact is—" and the colour deepened yet more on his cheeks—"the fact is, it would be more convenient to let it stand over a little. I have been spending a good deal of ready money lately—the Beacon Bay estate, and so on."

Mrs. Waters turned pale with consternation.

"Oh! Austin, what do you mean? You have been spending so much that you actually cannot afford——"

"Afford! do you talk as if I couldn't afford a trumpery four hundred pounds? No, no, it's only that I don't want to spend more ready money than I can help just at present, that's all I mean."

"How much did the Beacon Bay estate cost you, Austin?" asked the wife anxiously.

"Not a penny more than it is worth, nor half so much either, so make your mind easy about that."

"How much, Austin dear?" she repeated.

"Well, if you must know, forty thousand down, and forty thousand remaining on mortgage. Tovey says it is the greatest bargain that has been going this twenty years. But of course it is a point with me to save all the ready money I can, in order to get on with the building—the building is the soul of the whole thing, you see."

"Eighty thousand pounds is a great deal to give," said Mrs. Waters nervously. "And what did Mr. Podmore say about it?"

"Podmore! what does it matter what an old fool like Podmore said?"

"He did not approve it, then?"

"No, or pretended not to approve it, rather—just because the property wasn't in his hands to dispose of, and none of the agency commission came his way. Sly old fox!—I know what he was thinking of. Don't you let it bother you, Agnes, the railway is sure to be made, let him say what he will, and the man is such a precious ass that I declare I wish I was out of his hands altogether. Look at the mess he made of that affair with Mossman—a pretty lawyer in-

deed ; he knows no more about law or business than a baby."

"The affair with Mossman ! Have you had any more trouble about that ?"

"Ah ! to be sure, I didn't say anything about it in my letters, for I thought it was no good to plague you, and I wanted to forget it myself if I could. Yes, that fellow Mossman—let me see, he sent in his bill for the watch and chain before you went away, didn't he ? ah ! of course he did—well, after that he set his lawyer to write to me (Frisby is his lawyer, by the way, and a sharp fellow too), and threatened me with an action and I don't know what. So I went to Podmore and asked him what I was to do, and Podmore said that if I refused to pay I should have to get you and Emmy home from Nidbourne as witnesses, and go to all sorts of trouble and expense, and then very likely lose after all, for, as he admits himself, the rascal Frisby is up to everything, and altogether he seemed to advise me to give in."

"I dare say it was the best way, dear."

"The best way—yes, very likely it was the best way with an old slowcoach like Podmore



to manage matters, but it was rather hard to pay for a thing I didn't order, just because I had a fool for a lawyer. Not that I minded the money, of course, but I didn't relish knuckling down to a low blackguard like Mossman."

"Better than going to law and losing, at any rate."

"Well, well, that may be, but perhaps I haven't done with going to law yet. There's a talk now of the fellow bringing an action for slander against me, just because I told somebody he was a damned infernal swindling scoundrel—and so he is too, and if you remember Podmore himself as good as said he was; but Podmore swears he never could have said anything of the sort. And now that he has got me into the scrape, he can do nothing but shake his head and tell me I was very imprudent, and I shouldn't wonder a bit if the vagabond brings his action and gets it too, for Frisby understands what he is about, you may make up your mind to that. I often wish I had him to do with instead of Podmore, that's all."

"Oh! Austin dear, you have nothing to regret in that. You know he is not con-

sidered nearly so respectable as Mr. Podmore."

"Oh yes! I know all about that, and I dare say it's true too—very likely he is as great a scamp as his client. But if you get a scamp on your own side, mind you, it isn't always such a bad thing. Set a thief to catch a thief, eh? and I think in law they are pretty nearly all thieves together. I have reason to say so in this affair at all events."

"I am very sorry you should have been worried so, Austin."

"Oh! the worry it has been you have no idea—just at this time, too, when I have so much to think of. Why, what with one thing and another I have not had a minute to call my own since I saw you."

"I noticed you were looking rather tired, dear," said the wife, glancing at him with some solicitude. "But why should you have been doing so much when there was no need?"

"No need! It is very fine for you who have been enjoying yourself at the sea-side to say there was no need, but how do you suppose you would have found things looking, if there had not been somebody to think for you?"

Have I not had the carriage to order, and the servants to engage, and the liveries to choose, and—I declare I thought I never should have got through it all. And then the building at Chorcombe Lodge, and the upholsterer's estimate (for I am getting part of the furniture made to order), and the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and the plans of the town, and the proving of the will—enough to keep me at it day and night, I can tell you.”

He took out his handkerchief and pressed it to his forehead with an air of weariness before resuming:

“Then to think how my time has been wasted with people calling and writing, and introducing other people—not that it has all been wasted time either, for I have picked up one or two very useful acquaintances that way. Of course one has to be very cautious whom one encourages, but when one sees that something is really to be made out of people—Now the other day I had a Mr. D'Almayne calling on me at the Brown Bear—a great connoisseur in art he is, and upon my word the conversation I had with him quite gave a new turn to

my ideas. He says if I would only put myself in his hands he would undertake to make my house an attraction to all the lovers of art in the country."

"But you don't care much about that, do you, dear?"

"Oh! I don't want to be too ambitious at present, of course, but, as he says, any gentleman's house, to be a gentleman's house at all, must make some little show of art-treasures, more or less, and really if you could hear him speak you would understand that it is by no means intrinsically such an expensive taste. But you shall see him and judge for yourself. He is to pass through Chorcombe again next week on his way from a great sale of pictures at some nobleman's seat in Wales, and I have asked him to dine with us on Tuesday."

"To dine with us here, Austin?"

"Yes, certainly, so we must see and get a few friends together to meet him—I have asked Podmore and the Elkinsees already. Now then, who can this be?"

The visitors' bell had just sounded, and husband and wife both raised their eyes towards

the window, wondering if their guest Mr. Graham could have already returned from his walk with Olivia. It was not, however, Mr. Graham whom they saw coming up the gravel-walk, but a spare lithe-looking man of middle age, dressed in slightly rusty black, with bilious complexion, lank wiry hair, and thin wedge-like features of very flexible conformation.

"I declare if that is not Frisby!" exclaimed Austin in astonishment.

"I wonder what he can want," said Mrs. Waters uneasily.

"Something about that affair of Mossman, no doubt. Well, I had better see him, I suppose."

The words had scarcely left his lips when one of the white-headed footmen entered to inform his master that a gentleman was waiting outside who particularly begged the favour of a minute's interview.

"You can show him in," said Austin loftily.

And immediately the sallow face of Mr. Frisby showed itself in the doorway, composed into its most insinuating expression.

"If you will excuse the liberty, sir," said the visitor, advancing with an air of the profound-

est respect, while a pair of shining black eyes were cast in rapid and admiring observation round the room. "I am aware that I ought to have sent in my card," he added, as the door closed, "but the fact was, I was afraid it might create a prejudice, and I was so very anxious to see you——"

"Oh! I had recognised you already from the window," interposed Austin with dignity.

"You had? Then sir, I can only say how grateful I am to you for admitting me under the circumstances, but of course a gentleman can always distinguish between professional duty and personal feeling. I have called on business, sir, I need not say, or I never should have taken the liberty of presenting myself; but before I go further perhaps Mrs. Waters will allow me to congratulate her on her return. I had the pleasure of witnessing Mrs. and Miss Waters's arrival from my office window this afternoon."

With this he made a very low bow to the lady of the house, who, though secretly rather afraid of him, could not do otherwise than bow in return.

"Pray take a chair, Mr. Frisby," politely said Austin, on whom a very favourable impression had been made by the notion of the lawyer rushing to the window and standing there to the neglect of all other business while the carriage containing Mrs. and Miss Waters passed by.

Mr. Frisby, with another very low bow, took a chair as he had been told, and then, clearing his throat modestly, began :

"When I say I have called on business, sir, you will naturally wonder that I have not addressed my communication to Mr. Podmore instead of intruding it upon you. So I ought to have done in strictness, no doubt, but the truth is, there was a personal explanation which I was very desirous of making. I don't often trouble the opposite side with personal explanations, but in a case where I feel so much respect as I do in the present, I can't be satisfied without it. You are aware, sir, that I am acting in the interests of Mr. Mossman?"

Austin winced, and said he understood so.

"Mr. Mossman came to me in the way of business, and placed himself in my hands, and

naturally I am bound to do the best I can for him, just as I should have been bound to do the best I could for anybody else who had come to me as client—for you yourself, sir, supposing you had done me such an honour. I hope you quite see it?”

“Oh yes! quite,” said Austin, with a slight sigh.

“Mr. Mossman conceived that you owed him a certain sum of money, and of course when he employed me, it was my duty to take the legal steps for pressing the claim, just as, supposing I had had the happiness of being in Mr. Podmore’s place, it might have been my duty to take steps towards resisting it.”

“Just so,” said Austin with another sigh.

“But Podmore didn’t resist, you know.”

“And now that Mr. Mossman unfortunately conceives himself injured by certain words you have spoken affecting his reputation, it is of course my duty to support his claim under that head also, only entreating you to believe what a hardship I find it to have to act professionally against a gentleman I so much respect and admire. And I am sorry to say that is the busi-



ness I have come about this evening, sir."

"What! is the man going to bring his action for slander, then?"

"If we cannot succeed in arranging a compromise, there is no doubt about it, I am afraid, sir."

"I'll have none of your confounded compromises," cried Austin angrily. "I've yielded once—and let me tell you, it was Podmore's doing, and not mine, that I ever paid a penny—and I won't yield a step further. Let him bring his action, and be damned to him!"

"That is as you wish, sir, altogether," said Mr. Frisby obsequiously. "But if you are going to resist now—and of course it is not for me to advise you one way or the other—but if you are, what a pity it is you gave way in the other matter!"

"Of course it was a pity, and I knew it at the time, and told Podmore so. But better do the right thing late than never."

"As a general rule no doubt, sir, but I am afraid in the present case——A judge and jury would be sure to regard the act of payment as an acknowledgment on your part that Mr.

Mossman's claim was just ; and if it was just, the argument will be that you brought false and unwarrantable charges——”

“But the claim was not just—and I never will let it be said that it was—the most swindling, rascally——”

“Austin ! Austin !” put in Mrs. Waters in dismay. But Mr. Frisby laid his hand on his heart.

“The privacy of this room is to me sacred,” he declared with devout emphasis. “But to return to what we were saying ; whether Mr. Mossman's claim was just or not, the great fact remains that it was paid, and that will be enough to raise a presumption of its justice in a jury's mind—you know how proverbial is the stupidity of juries, Mr. Waters—and in that case the plaintiff would be as sure of a verdict as anything, and nobody could say what damages they might not clap on. There is no calculating the pigheadedness of a jury, really.”

“Then what do you think I had better do ?” asked Austin, who by this time had nearly forgotten that Mr. Frisby was on the other side, or, if he remembered the fact, resented it no longer.

“On that point it is not for me to advise, of course. But I have reason to believe that my client would be content with a very small sum offered by way of compromise, and I cannot help thinking that to avoid the annoyance of a public trial and the risk of heavy damages it would be worth your while——”

“How much do you suppose he would take, Mr. Frisby?”

The lawyer paused with an air of profound reflection, and then answered deliberately:

“I think I could undertake to compromise the case on the spot in consideration of your note of hand for fifty pounds.”

“Fifty pounds!” said Austin, a little staggered.

“In the last action for defamation that I had to do with, the jury found a verdict for five hundred.”

“Had you not better consult Mr. Podmore about it?” said Mrs. Waters, seeing her husband wavering.

“It is quite possible that Mr. Podmore may advise you differently,” said Mr. Frisby, and

from his manner it might have been thought that he was seconding Mrs. Waters's suggestion.

"But if you are going to resist now, it is a terrible pity you did not resist before."

"Ah yes! that idiotic mistake of Podmore's! But he shan't bungle the business any more, that's one thing. I'll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, sit down and make out something for me to sign, and we'll get rid of this cursed nuisance out of hand."

"Well, sir, I really think it is the wisest course you could pursue under the circumstances, speaking quite impartially, you know," said Mr. Frisby with an air of great candour, drawing his seat nearer the table while Austin laid before him pen and paper.

Mrs. Waters said nothing. For her own part she had a prejudice in favour of Mr. Podmore as a steady-going family lawyer, and something of a prejudice against Mr. Frisby; but then she knew too little of business not to distrust her own judgment. Besides, she had also a strong prejudice in favour of keeping out of law wherever and whenever it was possible, and did not like to make any further suggestion that

might have the effect of delaying a settlement.

In a minute or two more Mr. Frisby had made a memorandum of the terms on which, as Mr. Mossman's legal adviser, he was willing that the affair should be arranged, and handed it to Austin to sign. This, after a careful reading and re-reading of the document, which gave him a high opinion of his own caution, Austin presently did, though not altogether with a good grace.

"That confounded Podmore!" he muttered as he laid down the pen. "Well, Mr. Frisby, here it is, but though it may be law, mind you, it isn't justice."

"Ah! sir, law and justice don't always go together, worse luck," said Mr. Frisby, casting his eye over the paper which Austin pushed towards him, and folding it up with visibly heightened spirits. "It isn't because a man has got a good cause that he wins, or a bad cause that he loses; it is only just a matter of how the affair is managed for him. The glorious uncertainty of the law, sir, eh? But it's very shocking, seriously it's very shocking."

"If you had managed my affair from the first I believe you would have won for me," said Austin emphatically.

"Oh sir!" said Mr. Frisby, simpering.

"I believe you would. As you say, it was all that cursed blunder of Podmore's, advising me to give in."

"Oh! sir, excuse me, I didn't quite say that. Though I won't deny that I have seen much weaker cases successfully defended."

"And what possessed Podmore not to defend mine, then?" asked Austin bitterly. "But I suppose he felt his own incompetency, that was it."

"Oh! Mr. Waters, you are really very severe on us poor men of law. No, you must let me stand up for Mr. Podmore, if you please, sir; he is a most respectable man, and for all matters of ordinary routine business thoroughly to be depended on. But he belongs to the old school, of course we all know that, and members of the old school are apt to strike us men of the world as rather slow and timid in their ideas, are they not, sir?"

"Oh yes! slow enough and timid enough

in all conscience," said Austin surlily.

"There seems to be a want of go about them, if I may use the expression—Why, there is even Mr. Podmore—a first-rate man for all routine business as I have said—and yet I have actually heard that he goes about throwing cold water on this Beacon Bay scheme—quite one of the finest ideas of the age, you know, sir. And by the way, that reminds me, you have something to do with it, I think?"

"I have bought the whole property," said Austin, unconsciously drawing himself up as he spoke.

"You have, sir!" said Mr. Frisby with well affected surprise. "Allow me to offer you my heartiest congratulations. Why, then I suppose I have been misinformed as to Mr. Podmore's views after all."

"No, you have not; he tries to make out that they won't so much as get the railway."

"No, does he really though?—a thing that is as certain as daybreak to-morrow morning. Quite inconceivable, upon my word, how people can so blind themselves."

"Just what I say," rejoined Austin with a

triumphant look at his wife. "But none so blind as those that won't see."

"I can't make it out at all," went on Mr. Frisby, pondering as though still lost in perplexity. "If it was anybody else than Mr. Podmore, I should think——"

"What should you think?" asked Austin inquisitively, as the speaker suddenly interrupted himself.

"I was going to say that if it had been anybody else than Mr. Podmore, I should think that he didn't want you to put your money in a good investment because he had a bad investment of his own to recommend—he! he! But that is impossible with a person of Mr. Podmore's respectability—quite out of the question. Though I won't say but what there are some lawyers capable of it—ah! too many, I am afraid, Mr. Waters."

"I suppose there are," said Austin thoughtfully, for he was trying to remember if Mr. Podmore's arguments would bear any such construction.

"Ah! we are a bad lot, sir, a very bad lot. Don't believe a word we say, Mr. Waters, and then you're safe."



But this warning had only the effect of inspiring Austin with greater confidence in his new friend than ever.

"Ah! you may laugh, sir, but it is too true—only too true; we are not to be trusted an inch further than you can see us—he! he! But dear me! it is getting quite dark; I am afraid I have been trespassing sadly on your valuable time."

And Mr. Frisby rose to go, not without an idea that he was leaving a very good impression behind him.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Frisby," said Austin patronisingly. "On the contrary, I am very glad to have had this conversation with you."

"You flatter me very much, sir. And I am sure if you only knew how gratified I am to have had this opportunity of paying my respects to you and Mrs. Waters——"

"Oh! but I quite hope this opportunity may not be the last," said Austin, even more graciously than before. He had a notion that it might possibly be worth while to reserve an opening for the future cultivation of Mr. Frisby's acquaintance.

"I'm sure, sir, how to thank you for your

kindness I really don't know. And I hope I need not say that any commands which you may at any time have for me I shall always be proud to obey. Good evening, sir. Mrs. Waters, I have the honour of wishing you a very good evening."

Austin bowed, and Mrs. Waters bowed, and Mr. Frisby, having made a lower bow than either, was about to pass out of the room when the master of the house rose and came after him.

"I will open the door for you, Mr. Frisby."

For somehow Austin felt reluctant to let his visitor go without making some further step towards securing his good-will. Who knew what bids might be made for that good-will, and from what quarter, before the occurrence of another opportunity such as the present?

"Oh sir!" exclaimed Mr. Frisby, in modest deprecation of so much honour.

But in spite of protest Austin persisted in accompanying him into the hall. Nor did his politeness stop even here.

"Let me see," he said as soon as they were out of the room, "we are expecting a few friends

to dinner next Tuesday. I wonder if you will join us—if you have no engagement, that is?”

“There are some occasions, Mr. Waters, on which all engagements give way,” rejoined Mr. Frisby with almost reverential courtesy. “Next Tuesday did you say, sir?”

“Next Tuesday at seven o’clock.”

“I shall be only too happy to avail myself of the privilege,” said Mr. Frisby solemnly.

Matters being thus arranged, Mr. Frisby bowed himself out, and started on his walk home in high good-humour, while Austin returned to the library in high good-humour also, and with a feeling of having made one of the shrewdest strokes of diplomacy he had ever made in his life. And yet, well pleased as he was with his evening’s work, he was not in quite such a hurry as might have been expected to announce his triumph to his wife. The fact was, he knew that his wife did not understand much about business, and he had an instinctive suspicion that to anybody understanding less about business than he did himself the profound wisdom of his policy might not be so instantly apparent as it ought to be.

## CHAPTER VII.

*Cousin Randal Again.*

THREE days had passed, and Olivia sat alone in a pleasant morning-room opening on the bright flower-garden and sun-lit lawn of Egerton Park. Alone—that was nothing new, but it was something new for her to feel quite so much alone as she did just now. For in that room a few minutes ago she had parted from her lover, and the hitherto unknown rapture which she had found in his companionship made solitude seem more solitary than ever it had done before. As she cast her eyes round, looking at the chair on which he had sat, the writing-table on which his arm had rested, the paper-weight he had unconsciously made precious by trifling with, the spot where he had stood to bid her farewell, the doorway through which she had seen him pass,

she felt her sight grow dim, and asked herself with a kind of consternation how she should get through the months which must elapse before she could see him pass through that doorway again.

And yet in the midst of her pain she was happy—happy with a happiness of which that pain was the best measure. It was because she loved him that she missed him so ; because she loved him, and knew that he loved her and that by his love she was made free to love him without stint. And she did love him without stint, loved him with her whole heart and soul, loved him so well that sometimes she was almost fain to smile at herself for her own feelings. But if she smiled over her feelings occasionally, she was not ashamed of them ; she could not be ashamed of bestowing all that she had of love on him of whom she was so proud, to whom she was so grateful. Yes, grateful—how could she fail to be grateful to the man who, supposing her to be poor and dependent, had singled her out from all the world to be his wife, who had given her that delight which she had believed she never could experience, the delight of knowing

herself to be loved for her own sake? As she thought of all that he had done for her, comparing her present self with the poor useless vacant thing she had been before, she looked up brightly through her tears, and acknowledged that in spite of temporary separation she was supremely blest.

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Randal Egerton has called. I said I didn't know if you were at home, ma'am."

Olivia brushed her tears hastily away.

"Mr. Randal Egerton! Oh! show him in by all means."

She had never been less in the mood for receiving visitors, but her happiness made her kindly disposed towards all the world, and certainly she could not think of sending from her door her own cousin and her father's nephew. So when the visitor was ushered in, she went forward with extended hand to meet him, feeling more amicably inclined towards him than perhaps she had ever felt before, but still with a certain mechanical dreaminess in her manner which, had the young man observed it, he would hardly have deemed complimentary. He did not ob-

serve it, however, and, striding forward with eager gallantry, took the proffered hand and raised it to his lips.

“Welcome back to Somerset, fair cousin,”

“Thank you, Randal,” said Olivia cordially, for it seemed to her for a moment that he was congratulating her on something besides her return home—and she allowed him to retain her hand a little longer than usual. “You are all quite well, I hope?” she asked presently, with a sudden recollection of the proprieties of the occasion.

“Quite well—well enough considering the dulness you have condemned us to, at least. Why, Olivia, we thought you were never coming home.”

“Did you? Still I have not been so very long away. Won’t you sit down, Randal?—here is a chair,” she added quickly, for she thought he was about to step towards the seat which Mr. Graham had occupied that same morning.

“It did not seem long to you perhaps, but it did to us,” he answered politely, as with much satisfaction he took the chair which Olivia had

pointed out, almost close to her own. "And how long have you been back?"

"I returned three days ago. It was very kind of you to think of coming to see me so soon."

"Oh! that's nothing—I would have been over a great deal sooner, but I have been up in town for the last week, and only got home yesterday. I did not even know that you were back till I inquired at the lodge just now, but I could not wait a day at home without coming over on the chance of seeing you."

"It was very kind of you," reiterated Olivia.

He was quite surprised to find her so gracious, and determined to make the most of his opportunity.

"Kind! Oh! well, I can't say anything about that. There is no merit in doing what you can't help, you know."

And he heaved a deep sigh.

Olivia had been so much engrossed with her own feelings and her own ideas that she did not quite understand what he meant, and looked at him with surprised inquiry. Her glance was met by another so tender that it roused



her from her waking trance more effectually than anything that had gone before, at the same time that it cast an abrupt chill on the friendliness with which she had been disposed to regard her visitor. Was he actually going to begin that wearisome tale of mock love over again? He had heard nothing of her real love, then? To be sure, this was the first time that he had been in the neighbourhood of Egerton Park since her engagement had been made known.

“Ah! Olivia, you pretend not to understand, but it is only pretence. You understand that I love you, you understand——”

“Mr. Egerton!” said Olivia sternly. It seemed a kind of profanation that Randal Egerton should sit there speaking to her of love, in that room where Harry Graham had spoken to her of love so short a while before.

“Olivia!” he cried in distracted accents. But all cousinly kindness was thoroughly chilled in her heart now, and she went on without compunction:

“I see you have not heard of what has happened since we met last, Randal.”

“Of what has happened—why, what has happened?” he asked, looking at her in surprise. He noticed now that there was something unusual about her, that there had been something unusual about her all the time they had been talking; but it was beyond his skill to discover what that something was, still more to form any theory as to its cause.

“Randal, you must congratulate me on being very happy,” she said, with a sudden influx of the universal philanthropy in which even Randal Egerton was included. “I am engaged.”

He stared as though hardly understanding the meaning of the words.

“Engaged! Engaged to be married, do you mean?”

“Yes, engaged to be married.”

He was silent—stunned by a blow the most disagreeable that he had ever experienced. Olivia going to be married—the broad acres of the family estate, which he had never been able to regard without something of an owner’s interest, about to be transferred to an utter stranger, and, so far as he and his were concerned, blotted out of existence! And if the

sense of loss and disappointment was strong, stronger yet was the sense of personal mortification and defeat. He had laid deliberate siege to Olivia's heart and failed, and had not only failed, but had been beaten in the competition by another, beyond doubt infinitely his inferior. He, Randal Egerton, had condescended to avow a preference for a woman who had been a governess, who was not a beauty, and who was some months older than himself—he had even condescended to feel something like a preference for her—and this was his reward! Heavens and earth! As he thought of it all, the very room seemed to spin round with him.

"You are very much surprised, I think," he heard Olivia say at last.

He stirred himself up, and prepared to play his part. It would not do to make her think that he was regretting her property, and, strange to say, he was yet more jealous of letting her suspect what modicum of sincerity there might have been in his past professions of tenderness.

"I am very much surprised, yes," he answered smiling. "You have so often said you were

going to be an old maid that upon my word I was beginning to believe you. And then so cool-headed and sensible as you have always shown yourself——”

“And you think that now I am showing myself hot-headed and foolish, you mean? well, we will not argue about that. But are you not going to congratulate me?”

“I will congratulate you, Olivia,” he replied, with the mild gravity of an elder brother appealed to by an impassioned younger sister, “when as your near relation I am satisfied that your choice has fallen on one worthy of you, and worthy of recognition by your family. What is he, and what is his name?”

“His name is Henry Graham,” said Olivia haughtily, “and he is so exactly what I wish him to be that I would not have anything about him changed for the world. I am satisfied, and that may be enough for those connected with me.”

“Graham—Graham. Of what family?”

“I neither know nor care.”

“Not of large property then?”

“Not of large property that I know of. But

it seems to me that these are questions entirely unwarranted on your part."

"Excuse me, my dear cousin, but I cannot think so. You are the heir of an old and honoured family—I am your near relation—and surely I have a right to satisfy myself, if I can, that you are not throwing yourself away on some needy adventurer who is thinking of nothing but your money. And certainly with your strong sense you must understand that when a woman situated as you are receives professions of love from a man of no property, the presumption is——"

"I know what the presumption is," interrupted Olivia, drawing herself up with a glowing pride in herself and her betrothed such as she had never yet felt, for she was thinking how different the reality was from what her cousin imagined, and imagined not unnaturally. "But perhaps your kind concern may be allayed when you hear that I was engaged to Mr. Graham before he knew that there was such a place as Egerton Park in existence. He asked me to marry him supposing me to be neither more nor less than Miss Waters's governess."

But somehow the announcement which she felt such glory in making did not appear to impress Randal as she had expected. He looked surprised indeed, but his surprise was expressed in a shrug of the shoulders, as though it were excited rather by something in herself than by what she had said.

"My dear Olivia! And do you mean to say you actually believe that?"

Olivia's lip curled with measureless scorn.

"You cannot believe it, I dare say," she answered. She remained sitting for a moment, her lip curling still as she thought of the pitiful shallowness of nature that could not even comprehend the magnanimity which in Henry Graham seemed a mere matter of course; then she rose with the stateliness of an empress.

"Mr. Egerton, I will wish you good morning. Another time, when you are able to speak without insulting me, I shall be happy to see you."

And ere he could reply, she swept from the room with an air of offended dignity which he had never even imagined in her.

The surprise of her abrupt departure, coming

so soon after that other surprise of finding her and her fortune about to pass out of his reach for evermore, was fairly overpowering, and for some time he sat where she had left him, pondering over his disappointment and his wrongs. For though his self-love had enabled him to bear the wound with comparative equanimity while Olivia was present, the wound had been a very deep one for all that, and the more he probed it the deeper he found it.

But it was no good to sit brooding there all morning, so at last he rose, and, with a bitter look round at the smiling stretches of turf and shady woods in which he could no longer feel a proprietary interest, he strode out of the room and the house, and went round to the stables. There, addressing with a smiling face the first servant he met, he gave directions for his horse to be got ready and brought down to the entrance of the park, whither he would make his own way on foot—because he preferred to walk, he said, in reality because he could not endure to hang about in view of gossiping grooms and stable-boys.

He set out on his walk in a sufficiently unen-

viable frame of mind, passing by with downcast eyes the prettiest bits of landscape, and occasionally muttering the name of Graham between his teeth. Probably by reason of this pre-occupation, he suddenly found himself, before he was aware of it, within a few feet of a female figure sitting under shelter of a large parasol on a rustic bench beside the path. He was not in the mood for caring to appear polite, and was about to turn another way when a movement of the parasol showed him a fair, fat, flaxen-ringed face which he at once recognised as that of Olivia's elderly lady-companion, Mrs. Waddilove. He had not hitherto been disposed to be specially civil to Mrs. Waddilove, whom indeed he had been apt to regard as a decided bore, but to-day he had no sooner caught sight of her than he advanced, bowing and smiling as though she had been the most valued of his friends.

"Ah! Mrs. Waddilove, how do you do? Enjoying the beauties of nature, I see?"

And he actually went up and gave her his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" said Mrs. Waddilove respectfully, thinking to herself the while what



a very nice young man he was. "Yes, it is very pleasant here, is it not? I have been away visiting my friends while Miss Egerton was in Dorsetshire, and upon my word I find it quite delightful to be back again."

"Ah yes! I dare say. And so"—here he took care to smile more than ever—"so it seems there have been important changes in progress during your absence. My cousin going to be married—who could possibly have thought it?"

He had done his best to persuade her to be married for some years past, but now it pleased him to speak as though in the mere notion of her marriage there were some strange incongruity.

"Well, it was very unexpected, was it not, sir?"

"Unexpected!—the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of, upon my honour. And then the air of romance there seems to be about it, on her part at least, poor thing—that's the queerest bit of it all. Why, if she had been a girl of seventeen instead of what she is, she couldn't have been more in love, positively."

He was aware, or might have been aware if he had thought about it, that his own former designs on his cousin must have been perfectly well known to Mrs. Waddilove, and yet he could not deny himself the pleasure of this dig.

"It is very strange, sir, certainly," said Mrs. Waddilove, who, as a companion about to be superseded, was no better pleased with Olivia's engagement than Randal himself. "But she seems to be very happy, and that is the principal thing, of course."

"Oh! of course, and if I could only be certain that it would last, I could wish nothing better, I need not say. But so much depends on how this Mr. Graham may turn out—Can you tell me anything about him?"

"He seems a very nice gentleman, sir, but nothing so wonderfully out of the way either. He is very clever and all that, I dare say, but I don't know that I should call him particularly good-looking myself."

And as Mrs. Waddilove spoke, she could not help marvelling at Miss Egerton's taste in preferring a bronzed weather-beaten man of middle age like Mr. Graham to the handsome cava-

lier who even then stood before her, and whom the good lady knew that in her own younger days she could not possibly have resisted.

“Ah! I understand—as ugly as sin,” muttered Randal with a caress of his silken beard. “But what I rather meant was—who is he, what is he, where does he come from, how did she get to know him? These are not questions I can exactly put to my cousin, of course, and yet as her relative you will see that I must be anxious——”

“It is very kind of you, I am sure, sir, and I wish there was more that I could tell you, but I only came back yesterday, you must remember. He seems to have been a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Waters, by what I can make out, and went down to visit Mrs. Waters and her daughter at Nidbourne. I don’t suppose Miss Egerton ever saw him till then; indeed now that I think of it I am sure she never did, for she told me herself that this is his first visit home from India for nearly twenty years.”

“India! Not a military man, is he?”

“Oh no! sir.”

“In some rascally business then. And do

you mean to say she knows nothing of him except through the Waterses?"

"I think that was the only introduction."

"And they have not had him under their eyes for twenty years, it seems. Why then, for aught she knows he may be a regular swindler and blackleg, with a wife and a dozen children, perhaps. This ought to be looked into, Mrs. Waddilove."

"Certainly it ought, sir," said Mrs. Waddilove, almost frozen with virtuous horror at Randal's last suggestion. "And I'm sure how thankful she ought to be to think what a kind friend and adviser——"

"Oh! well, I do what I can, but it is very difficult to befriend and advise some people," said Randal, his brow darkening as he thought of how Olivia had taken his display of interest in her affairs. "And where is this Mr. Graham to be found, supposing that for my cousin's sake I thought it right to take any steps?"

"He has been staying at the Laurels—Mr. Waters's new place, you know. But I am pretty sure he must have started by this time; it is more than an hour since he was here to say

good-bye to Miss Egerton, and he would naturally be with her up to the last minute he could, with such a long separation to look forward to."

"Separation! Where is he going then?"

"Back to India, sir, did you not know? He is obliged to return to wind up his affairs, and will be several months gone."

"Several months!" Randal's brow became perceptibly clearer. Who knew what several months might bring forth? He could not now regard the game as quite up, and was tempted to regret that he had taken such trouble to conceal from Olivia the pang which her news had cost him.

"I am very much obliged for your information, Mrs. Waddilove. And now if you will excuse me—my horse is waiting down at the gate. Good-bye; I am very glad indeed to have had the pleasure of seeing you."

And then, with a friendly pressure of the hand given in the same spirit with which he might have tipped her a sovereign had she been a little lower than she was in the social scale, he turned away, and walked gloomily towards

the gate, where, as gloomily, he mounted his horse and rode off. The game was not quite up perhaps, but he had enough to be gloomy about in all conscience. It was hardly likely that, with a rival to contend against, he should do in months what he had failed to do in years when there was no rival in the case. Unless indeed he could succeed in discovering something to that rival's discredit—and the man who had made love to an heiress under pretence that he knew nothing about her money was sure to be a discreditable character in one way or another. But then supposing him to be the greatest villain unchanged (as he very likely was), how was the fact to be proved?

In this desponding mood Randal rode on, until at last a new turn was given to his thoughts by a glimpse which he caught of the words "The Laurels" inscribed in neat white letters on a large freshly painted gate.

"The Laurels—that's where he is, confound him, or has been at least."

He cast a resentful look at the spruce white house visible through the clustering lilac and laburnum trees that overhung the wall. As

he looked a new idea seemed to occur to him, for he all at once became very meditative.

"I wonder if I could do any good by calling in there some day and asking a few questions," he was thinking.

He considered a little, and found the notion feasible enough.

"I am sufficiently introduced to call if I like without making them think there is anything under it. I have seen the girl at Olivia's often enough, and the mother too once or twice. And by the way, she wasn't a bad-looking girl either if she had been properly dressed. She is the only one, I think."

He looked over his shoulder at the house, no longer resentfully, yet with evident interest.

"She'll have enough to dress on now, at any rate. Two hundred thousand pounds, I think it was—why, Olivia herself doesn't much more than beat that. Ah! but then it isn't the girl's—it is the father's. And if the father is going to lock it up in the Beacon Bay estate, as they said he was when I was here last, and the railway perhaps never to be made at all——"

He shook his head slowly, and relapsed into

thought too vague to shape itself into words, even though unspoken ones. Presently he roused himself, and yet again looked back at the house.

“ Well, well, I can call in a day or two, at all events. It can do no harm to take a look, and who knows but that at the same time I may find out something? They will be more likely to know than Mrs. Waddilove, anyhow.”

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## CHAPTER VIII.

*Emmy was Right.*

EMMY was not altogether sorry when Mr. Graham went away. Not that she had any personal objection to his society, but it served to keep up in her mind a disagreeable suspicion which she had never yet had the courage to put an end to by a straightforward question, partly because she was afraid of offending her father and mother by an unworthy doubt, partly perhaps because she half unconsciously feared to find that doubt confirmed. It was rather a relief to her therefore when the departure of the guest allowed her to drop him and the misgivings connected with him out of her thoughts, as she speedily did amid the distractions of new dresses, new friends, new amusements, and new surroundings. In two

or three days she had ceased to trouble her head about Mr. Graham one way or another, except that she sometimes wondered how she had come to be so suspicious of him.

She was sitting with her mother one afternoon in the pretty drawing-room at the Laurels, with her work on her lap—no unsightly undergarment to be hemmed or stitched or darned, be it remembered, but some tangle of silk and beads entirely free from any taint of utility—when a loud peal was heard at the visitors' bell. The drawing-room was at the back of the house, where no view of a new-comer was to be commanded; but visitors were so much a matter of course now that Emmy did not allow herself to be flurried by the uncertainty, and calmly awaited the event with no symptom of interest beyond a smoothing out of the folds of her silk dress.

A servant entered and presented her mother with a card, which Mrs. Waters had only just had time to glance at when the visitor himself appeared in the doorway—a tall handsome young man with dark hair and eyes, whom Emmy, looking up with some curiosity, recog-

nised at once as Mr. Randal Egerton. And no sooner had she recognised him than she straightway lost some of her composure. The visitors to whom she had lately become accustomed had all been of commonplace humdrum type, Podmores and Elkinsees and Toveys and the like—people whom it was gratifying to be acquainted with on equal terms, but whom even in her poorest days Emmy had never exactly regarded as being fashioned of clay different from her own. But Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, a leading member of the county aristocracy, the only member of the county aristocracy she had ever come across except Olivia (and Olivia was so forgetful of her greatness that others were apt to forget it too), him she had always looked up to as belonging to a world in which she had no part—a world of rank and fashion, of Lady Ediths and Lady Beatrices, of gilded saloons and gay assemblies, of West End clubs and Bond Street shops, of Grand Stands and betting-books, of Opera coulisses and *rouge-et-noir* at Baden-Baden, of everything in fine that was bright, delightful, wicked, and unattainable. No won-

der then that, when she saw so distinguished a personage enter her mother's drawing-room, Emmy should feel mingled with her awe a touch of excitement and elation.

"Mrs. Waters!" he said—advancing, as Emmy remarked to herself, with exquisite grace—"how do you do? I have had the pleasure of seeing you a few times at my cousin Olivia's, but I am afraid you have almost forgotten me."

"Oh! dear no! I remember you quite well," said Mrs. Waters cordially, scarcely appreciating, however, the full force of this delicate flattery. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Egerton."

"You are exceedingly kind. The fact is, I found myself riding in this direction, and hearing that you lived here could not deny myself the pleasure of looking in to pay my respects to you and Miss Waters. Miss Waters, will you allow me?"

He picked up a skein of silk which Emmy in her confusion had let fall, and presented it to her with an easy yet respectful elegance of manner such as she had never before been approached with. She blushed and stammered

out what she feared was a very awkward acknowledgment of the courtesy; and then all three seated themselves, Emmy smoothing out anew the folds of her dress—there was something in the sound of the rustling silk which she found surprisingly reassuring. When she had got a little settled, she could not help thinking for a moment of John Thwaites, and wondering what he would say if he knew what a guest she and her mother were receiving.

“You and Miss Waters have just been making a stay in Dorsetshire, I believe?” she heard Mr. Egerton say.

“Yes,” replied her mother—“at a little place called Nidbourne.”

“Ah yes! I think I have heard the name—in a very pretty part of the county, I imagine.”

Here Emmy, taking for granted that the stranger’s attention was by this time completely diverted from herself, ventured to peep up in his direction, when to her consternation their eyes met. She was considerably put out by this little incident, but he did not lose an atom of his graceful self-possession—(how different from John Thwaites!).

"You liked the place, Miss Waters, I need not ask; you looked quite approvingly at the mere mention of its name."

"I liked it very much, thank you," murmured Emmy. "It is a very quiet pleasant little spot."

"I should have thought almost too quiet for a young lady. Do you like country better than town then?"

"I hardly know," said Emmy, overwhelmed with shame at having to make the confession. "I—I have never been in London."

"Never been in London!" he exclaimed, but his surprise was so entirely free from all flavour of superciliousness that Emmy felt it to be complimentary rather than otherwise.

"We should have gone this summer, I think," she said, striving to lessen the reproach of her inexperience as far as she could, "only papa has so much to do just at present that it is impossible for him to leave home."

"Mr. Waters is quite well, I hope?" Randal asked, with a polite look towards the lady of the house.

"Quite well, thank you," said Mrs. Waters.

"He is over at Beacon Bay on business to-day, or I am sure he would have been most happy to see you."

"You are very good to say so. Beacon Bay—I fancy Mr. Waters will have business at Beacon Bay for a long time to come, if what I hear is true, at least."

He accompanied the words with so manifest an expression of inquiry that Mrs. Waters felt herself compelled to answer:

"It is quite true. My husband has bought the estate."

"The whole of it? A very fine property, to be sure."

"Yes, the whole of it," said Mrs. Waters, with an almost imperceptible sigh.

"Indeed!" said Randal. "I have to offer him my best congratulations."

There was a pause, during which Emmy, with some dismay at her own audacity, caught herself stealing another look in the direction of the visitor. But this time their eyes did not meet, the young man's being turned towards the floor in apparent contemplation. The truth was, he was considering how he might best turn

the conversation to another topic on which he also wished for information.

"I had the pleasure the other day of hearing news that interested me very much," he said at last. "My cousin Olivia's engagement—you have known it from the beginning, I believe."

By this time he had had full leisure to decide upon his own attitude towards the fact which at first hearing had startled him so disagreeably, and, as will be seen, had considerably modified his original manner of treating it.

"Yes," said Mrs. Waters, "it was settled while she was with us at Nidbourne. I hope she will be very happy—indeed I may say that I am sure of it."

"Most sincerely do I trust so," said Randal fervently. "I have only one regret connected with the subject, and that is, that I had not the pleasure of making Mr. Graham's acquaintance before he left for India. I confess I should like to have seen something of the man on whom my cousin's future happiness depends."

"So far as it depends on him, I think I can undertake to answer for it," said Mrs. Waters warmly.



"I am so glad to hear you say so," was the delighted reply. "Ah yes! to be sure, I remember hearing that he was a friend of yours. And might I ask if you have known him long?"

Emmy listened very attentively.

"Yes, a great many years—both Mr. Waters and I."

"You can hardly imagine the satisfaction you are affording me, Mrs. Waters. I wonder if I might further ask whether you know anything of his family and connections? You will not find fault with me for my questions, I know; you must remember that I and my family are the only relations my poor cousin has in the world, and I feel it incumbent on me to make these inquiries on her behalf, just as, under like circumstances, you might make similar inquiries on behalf of any one closely connected with you."


With these words he directed a glance towards Emmy, who blushed, and gave one or two little adjusting taps to her dress which made it rustle more than ever. But presently she heard her mother's voice sound in reply, and the rustle was hushed instantaneously.

"I have known his family all my life long.

It was considered one of the most respectable in ——," and here Mrs. Waters mentioned the name of the town which had been her own native place.

Emmy's blushes had all disappeared now, forcibly driven away by the excitement of this new discovery. So it was definitely established that Mr. Graham had actually come from the place where her mother had come from—where her uncle Harold also had come from, that was to say. Not that the fact proved anything in itself, of course, but then why had it never hitherto been mentioned in her presence? She looked up suspiciously. Mrs. Waters was externally calm enough to deceive the eyes of any one not intimately acquainted with her, but the unwonted flush on her cheeks sufficed to convince Emmy that she was labouring under some unusual excitement.

"I can hardly express the relief that this has been to my feelings," said Randal sweetly, but with a certain blankness of look which might have stood as well for disappointment as satisfaction. "So that for Mr. Graham's earlier antecedents you yourself can vouch



by personal knowledge, and since then——”

“Since then all who know him in India will tell you that he has been respected and looked up to by everybody who has had to do with him,” said Mrs. Waters, with something in her manner that seemed almost like pride. “He belongs to the firm of Barret, Phillips and Graham in Bombay, and if you like to inquire——”

“Your assurance is more than sufficient,” interrupted Randal chivalrously. “You have not then lost sight of him during any part of the time—I mean that a correspondence of some sort has always been kept up?”

“Yes, always.”

Another fact for Emmy! Again the fact was one not counting for much in itself, but when it was considered how secretly the correspondence must have been carried on, how Emmy herself had never so much as seen the outside of a letter either directed to India or coming thence—— As she thought of it all, suspicion crystallised within her mind into something like certainty, and she became so strongly excited on the subject as to be impatient of everything that delayed the full explanation on which she was

now bent—impatient even of the presence of the brilliant stranger. She was quite relieved therefore when, with the courtly grace which seemed so natural to him, he rose to take leave.

“Mrs. Waters, I never can thank you enough for the satisfaction you have given me,” he said, in the same sweet voice as before. “I will not intrude longer to-day, but perhaps at some future time you will allow me the honour of repeating a visit which has afforded me so much pleasure.”

Of course Mrs. Waters said she would be very ppy to see him, and then he shook hands y casually, first with her and next with my, to whom he bowed with an air of respectful homage which under ordinary circumstances would have sent her into a flutter for our half-hour to come. But, as it was, she so impatient to be alone with her mother of anything else.

was alone with her mother at last, but as you to think how she should set about he had to say, she got so nervous that quite or two she was unable to say any all. It was Mrs. Waters therefore who

spoke first, wondering perhaps at her daughter's unaccustomed silence, and not unwilling to find out its cause.

"Well, Emmy, are you thinking what a polite visitor we have had?"

"He was very polite certainly," agreed Emmy, but she scarcely bestowed a thought on him as she spoke. "How anxious he was to find out something about Mr. Graham!" she added a little tremulously.

Her mother's colour had subsided, but Emmy noticed that it rose again at this.

"He wanted his cousin for himself, and he is jealous that she is going to marry somebody else," was Mrs. Waters's somewhat harshly given explanation.

"Oh! mamma, it did not seem to me that he was jealous a bit—indeed I think it must have been all a mistake about his ever caring for her in that way. But he is naturally anxious to know something about the person she is going to marry, and really for my part I think he is quite right. To tell you the truth I have sometimes wondered myself who Mr. Graham can be."

Emmy's heart beat fast as she uttered the last words, and she bent very close over her work while she waited for her mother's answer.

She waited, but no answer came. Emmy understood that now or never was the time for a decisive question, and, bending over her work closer still, she subjoined, in a voice scarcely audible through her trepidation :

"Do you know, mamma, I have sometimes thought he might have something to do with Uncle Harold?"

And then, the die being cast, she ventured to give a glance upwards just to see the effect.

Her mother, evidently in the extreme of agitation, was sitting with drooping head, and face covered by both hands.

"Mamma!" cried Emmy, startled in spite of all her previous suspicions. "It is true then?"

Mrs. Waters raised her face slowly, and turned it towards her daughter. It was pale as ashes.

"Emmy, promise you will never tell any living soul—promise as you love your mother."

But Emmy was so overwhelmed by her own conflicting emotions that she hardly noticed the appeal. She was at once surprised, mortified, ashamed, and angry—surprised at the discovery she had made, notwithstanding that she had been half prepared for it, mortified at the ignorance in which she had been kept so long, ashamed of the disgrace of contact with the felon uncle whose name she had always held in horror, above all angry that she should have been exposed to such disgrace. And the idea too of expecting her to keep the man's secret for him!

“Oh! mamma!” she exclaimed reproachfully, half crying as she thought of her grievances, “how could you do such a thing, how could you? To let him come here after all he has done—such a dreadful person—talking to us and living with us just like one of ourselves—and poor Miss Egerton, actually to think you would let her engage herself to him, and never say a word to put her on her guard. Oh! how could you?”

“Emmy, do you want to break my heart? Promise me you will never tell.”

"I don't know whether it is right to promise," whimpered Emmy. "Poor dear Miss Egerton—it seems right-down wicked to let her marry such a person without warning her. Oh! mamma, how could you? I really did think you cared for her."

"I do care for her, Emmy, and it is because I care for her that I am glad and rejoiced to see her marry my brother, for I know he loves her and will make her happy. He did not want her for her money—you know yourself that he did not; he asked her to be his wife believing that she had not a penny in the world, and he is a rich man now, you must remember. If she had been poor as he thought, you would have seen that it was cruel to part them, and is he to suffer just because she happens to have a few wretched acres of land that he had never heard of? And I can tell you, Emmy, that if he had heard of them he would sooner have cut off his right hand than ask her—he is my brother, and I know what he is made of."

The concluding words were spoken with an air of passionate pride which Emmy thought rather inappropriate to the subject. Still, ex-



aggrated as the tone of her mother's championship seemed, she could not help understanding that in spite of his past faults her uncle did most truly and sincerely love Miss Egerton, and would in all human probability make her happier than any one else could do. So, reflecting thus, Emmy began to relent a little.

"What does papa say?" she inquired. It was natural that her mother should be unduly lenient under the circumstances; but she felt that, if her father had brought himself to forgive the man who in requital of his benefactions had drawn shame and well-nigh ruin on his head, the fact would weigh for a good deal with her. "He knows who Mr. Graham is, I suppose?"

"He knows—oh yes!" answered her mother in low even tones.

"And he has forgiven him then?"

Mrs. Waters's lip quivered as though under the influence of some strong emotion, but with an evident effort at calmness she brought herself to say steadily:

"He has even accepted favours from him,

Emmy. If it had not been for the little sums your uncle Harold has lent us from time to time, I hardly know what we should have done to live; they make up nearly four hundred pounds now."

Emmy looked very much shocked.

"Oh! mamma, you actually mean to say papa has laid himself under obligations——"

"Poverty does strange things sometimes," said Mrs. Waters with a faint smile. "And people are very poor who have to live like gentlemen and ladies on a hundred a year."

"Oh yes! I know, but still——It seems such a degradation to have taken favours from a person like that—a person who has done such a base wicked thing, and brought such horrible shame on everybody connected with him. I wonder how papa could have forgiven him so far, that I do."

"Oh Emmy!" broke out Mrs. Waters almost with a cry, "how hard you are! how hard! God forgive you, my poor child, you don't know what you are doing."

"I did not mean to be hard, mamma," said Emmy, again relenting a little at sight of her

mother's distress. "But one must be just, you see, and poor Miss Egerton——"

"Be just to your uncle then, who has sacrificed himself to you ever since you were born," said Mrs. Waters impetuously, then more tranquilly she added: "For I am sure he has sometimes sent us money, Emmy, when he wanted it almost as much himself—it is only lately that he has been rich, you know, since he was taken into partnership; but through all the years that he was only a poor struggling clerk he never forgot that we were struggling too. Oh! Emmy, he has been very, very generous; can you not be a little like him?"

Emmy was touched—touched not only by her mother's entreaty and recital of her uncle's benefits, but also by her recollection of the traits of goodness which she herself had seen in him. In particular, she thought of the day when she had beheld him risk his life for that of a poor fisherman, and could not but admit to herself that he might deserve something better than the utter reprobation which she had been disposed to award him.

"Of course I suppose it is possible for a man

to do a very wicked thing once in his life without being altogether wicked in himself," she said meditatively.

"Thank God, yes," said Mrs. Waters, more earnestly than her daughter had ever heard her speak before. "Oh! my darling, how can you doubt it? And remember it is not only by the measure of our sin that we are judged, but by the measure of our temptation."

"Yes, and of our repentance," added Emmy, who thought that hardly any amount of temptation could palliate the heinousness of so gross and sordid and vulgar a sin as that of which her uncle Harold had been guilty. "And I suppose he really repents what he has done, does he not, mamma?"

A slightly bitter expression rose to Mrs. Waters's face, as though she deemed her daughter's inquisition over-exacting; but if this was her feeling she overcame it, and answered quietly:

"All men with any good in them repent the wrong that they have done, Emmy."

Emmy saw that she was paining her mother greatly by prolonged discussion, and, under-

standing that it behoved her to make an effort of magnanimity sooner or later, resolved to make it at once.

"Well, mamma, I don't mind saying that since you and papa have been kind enough to forgive him, I will try to forgive him too."

It seemed to Emmy that her mother did not quite sufficiently appreciate her generosity in making this declaration. Certainly it was met by a look much colder than she had anticipated.

"I do what I can, I'm sure," said Emmy apologetically, "but of course it is rather difficult to overlook such conduct all at once. I will promise never to tell anybody who he is, and surely that ought to be enough for the present."

"You promise, Emmy? Truly and faithfully promise?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Kiss me, my darling. You love me, I think?"

Emmy flung her arms round her mother's neck with a burst of tenderness.

"My own pet mamma! Oh yes! so dearly!"

"Then, Emmy, you will never, never break

the promise you have given me to-day.”

“Dear mamma, I never will,” said Emmy solemnly, for the pathos of her mother’s manner had gone to her very heart.


And at the time she thus passed her word she did most religiously intend to keep it.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Timon and his Friends.*

THE following day was a very important one for the household at the Laurels, bringing with it no less an event than Mr. and Mrs. Waters's first dinner-party—the very first, it need hardly be said, given by them during the whole of their married life. Such being the case, it is not surprising that the occasion was viewed with a good deal of anxiety, and that as the family trio, a long time before the appointed hour, assembled in the drawing-room to await the coming of the guests, there was even in Emmy's mind a feeling of trepidation which not the most unfeigned admiration of her own toilet could altogether allay.

There was a long period of suspense, rendered at last more intense still by a ring at the bell ;



and then, after a pause during which all eyes were turned nervously towards the door, came the first announcement.

“Mr. D’Almayne.”

This was the connoisseur in art whose acquaintance Austin had made during his sojourn at the Brown Bear, and in whose honour indeed the party had been originally projected. He was not an artist himself, but took some pains to cultivate the appearance of one; that is to say, he wore his dark hair very long, his beard full and somewhat raggedly cut, and particularly exercised himself in a certain restless distraught look about the eyes which he had seen practised by professional friends with wonderful effect.

Having been introduced to the ladies with as much propriety as Austin’s inexperience allowed, this personage inquired, as soon as the first courtesies were exchanged, if they had ever seen the great art collection of Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn in Wales. On being answered in the negative, he proceeded to expatiate on the delights of his recent visit there in the most glowing terms.

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“One of the greatest treats I ever had in my life, I do assure you. There are gems yonder which it is perfectly delicious to look at, or rather there were, for it is all broken up now. A great pity really, considering what a centre of attraction it constituted in the district—why, people came to see it from a hundred miles round and more. But well, it isn’t for me to complain, for I have picked up some most delicious things for the merest trifle—things that would be the making of any gallery in the country, and for the price of an old song almost.”

He had been addressing the ladies hitherto, but with the last words he gave a glance towards Austin.

“I am glad to hear that your journey has been so profitable,” said Austin, feeling himself bound to make some remark.

“As for profitable, I don’t know about that, for some of the things are so absolutely delicious that I don’t think I can ever bring myself to part with them—unless perhaps to some friend for the sake of friendship, and even then there are one or two gems—Why, there’s a Parmegiano that beats the one in the Pitti

Palace all to nothing, and a Garofalo——”

“Mr. Tovey.”

With a murmured apology to his new friend, Austin went forward to meet the little man, who came tripping into the room with his usual elastic step. After having duly paid his respects to his entertainers, he was presented to his distinguished fellow-guest.

“Allow me,” said Austin flurriedly—“Mr. Tovey, Mr. D’Almayne. I believe I have spoken to you about my friend Mr. Tovey, and to you about Mr. D’Almayne, I think, so that you both know each other already, one may say.”

The two gentlemen bowed, but, it must be said, rather stiffly and frigidly. Each had indeed heard of the other from Austin, and a strong mutual prejudice had been the result—Mr. Tovey setting down Mr. D’Almayne as a talking humbug whose art went no further than the art of picking people’s pockets, and Mr. D’Almayne condemning Mr. Tovey as a miserable quack who made a living by ruining people with brick and mortar.

“Mr. and Mrs. Elkins and Miss Elkins.”

Poor Mrs. Waters felt the troubles of hostess-

ship thickening fast upon her. The room was beginning to show a sprinkling of guests that looked quite formidable in her unaccustomed eyes, besides which there was something personal to the new-comers themselves which seemed at once to impart an extra flavour of formality to the occasion. They were all three so very staid and erect and unsmiling and wooden—all three, for Miss Elkins was little else than a copy of her mother, only rather faded and washed out; that is to say, slightly paler, slightly slimmer, and with light sand-coloured ringlets instead of iron-grey ones. Mrs. Waters hardly knew what to say to them for nervousness, and even Emmy experienced something of the same feeling. Before either had time to recover, a new announcement was heard.

“Mr. Podmore.”

But Mr. Podmore came ambling into the room in such evident good humour that it was impossible to be afraid of him. For though nobody could be more awe-inspiring than Mr. Podmore at certain times and seasons, he was capable of expanding into a high state of social geniality—a mood which nothing was so calcu-

lated to produce in him as the prospect of a good dinner. He was pretty sure of a good dinner to-day, and had come so thoroughly prepared to enjoy it that he was hail-fellow-well-met instantly with everybody in the room—everybody, except Mr. Tovey, whom he knew to have been Austin's adviser in the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and Mr. D'Almayne, who was a stranger to him; and even these he was disposed to patronise.

Still there is a point at which the worm will turn, and the purest milk of human kindness become sour. As Mr. Podmore was standing by his hostess's chair, bending forward to address her with a smiling courtesy reserved for the most favoured of his acquaintances, the door behind him opened, and a voice said :

“Mr. Frisby.”

Mr. Podmore was visibly startled—so much startled that, instead of going on to finish what he was saying, he stammered and broke down, and was fain to cover his breakdown by a fit of coughing, in the midst of which he took an opportunity of looking round. From the sudden change which then

appeared in him, it was evident that not till the moment of looking round had he believed in the monstrous enormity the possibility of which his ears had suggested. A dark cloud overspread his brow, which forthwith knitted itself into its most severe and magisterial corrugations; his lips, so lately relaxed in a smile, became pursed up into an expression of inflexible sternness which rendered it difficult to believe that they could smile at all; his whole figure straightened and stiffened itself with dignity and righteous anger. There is even reason to believe that he meditated instant departure from the house, but an instinct of lawyer-like prudence restrained him from committing himself to so extreme a measure, and he stayed. Nevertheless, though he stayed, he did not in the slightest degree unbend from the rigidity of his bearing—gazing steadily into space as Mr. Frisby approached to pay his respects to Mrs. Waters, and only intensifying the fixity of his gaze for the amiable smirk directed in passing towards himself. So freezing was his mien that Austin, who had hitherto considered it his duty to introduce his guests to each other and set them

talking, absolutely dared not make an attempt in that direction in the present instance. For a few moments a grim silence pervaded the room—the silence of a thunder-charged atmosphere—when, to the infinite relief of the master and mistress of the house, if of no one else, another arrival took place which had the effect of reviving the suspended buzz of conversation.

“Miss Egerton and Mrs. Waddilove.”

At sight of her friend's well-known face, the distressed hostess felt wonderfully fortified. There was something in Olivia's presence so intrinsically bracing and re-assuring that she would have found herself strengthened by it even apart from the fact that the heiress was a person whom all her other guests would esteem it an honour to be asked to meet ; but no doubt this fact was not without its value.

The party was now complete—that is to say, nobody else was expected, and a group of six ladies and six gentlemen were ready to take their places at the dinner-table. Nobody else was expected, for the old friend of the family John Thwaites, who had been their most frequent

guest in bygone days, had not been included in the list of invitations. Mrs. Waters had pleaded hard for him, but her husband had explained that a seventh gentleman would completely dislocate the whole arrangement of the dinner-table, and that it would really be a great deal kinder to ask him some other evening when there were not so many. Then Mrs. Waters, still persisting in her friendship for John Thwaites, had appealed to Emmy for assistance, but Emmy only tossed her head and said it would be a pity to spoil the party for John Thwaites indeed, and Emmy's casting vote had decided the question. And yet now Emmy, looking round at the assembled guests, could not help thinking that the room appeared somewhat blank and bare, and thinking also a little of John Thwaites.

Dinner was presently announced, and after a little floundering, for the host and hostess were too new to their office to manage matters faultlessly, the company were duly paired off and marched into the dining-room. Even there, sitting amidst a glow of plate and wax candles and ladies' jewels, with the gallant Mr. Tovey

by her side asking her opinion as to the decorations of the new ball-room—even there Emmy could not altogether keep herself from feeling a little dull and disappointed. Poor John Thwaites—well, it might have been no great harm to invite him after all.

Probably Emmy was not the only one at that glittering board who found the reality of the entertainment rather flat as compared with anticipation. Whether from an inherent fault in the composition of the company, or from a want of judgment in the pairing-off of the guests, the fragmentary conversation between neighbours necessary to the prosperity of a dinner-party hung fire sadly. Nobody got on quite harmoniously with his or her neighbour. It has been shown that Emmy found even Mr. Tovey's talk about the new ball-room slightly wearisome, and it may be imagined that poor Mrs. Waddilove over the way was yet more wearied by the discourse on high art which Mr. D'Almayne addressed to her for want of a more appreciative listener. Then Mr. Podmore, sitting at Emmy's other side, hardly said a word to her or anybody else, in spite of the good-natured attempts made



to draw him out by Olivia, to whom he had been assigned as a cavalier. He ate his dinner, he even ate it with more than usual gusto, feeling that it was his only compensation for the trouble of dressing and coming out, but more he could not and would not do. How indeed could he be expected to do more with the man Frisby sitting opposite to him—a low pettifogger whom it was an insult to ask a respectable solicitor to sit at the same table with? To give Mr. Frisby his due, it must be said that nobody could have acted with more perfect modesty and unobtrusiveness. He was very particular in attending to the wants of the lady next him, Miss Elkins, but he spoke seldom, and then in a low diffident voice which seemed intended as an apology for speaking at all. He evidently desired to efface himself so far as was in his power, and as Miss Elkins was miles away from being a lively young lady he was able to carry out this policy very successfully. The only occasions on which he slightly emerged from the back-ground were when somebody at table said something meant to be in the remotest degree humorous, which he was always sure to hear and laugh at, though

softly, very heartily, more especially if by rare chance Mr. Podmore happened to be the speaker. But even this did not disarm Mr. Podmore's wrath.

Under these circumstances things naturally went off rather tamely and heavily. Of course to an experienced host and hostess it would have been easy to start some subject of common interest in which all would have been able to join, and which should have the effect of putting all (except perhaps Mr. Podmore) into good humour with themselves and others. But Mrs. Waters and her husband were not experienced in the least, and, amid their anxiety that all should turn out well, found that they had more than enough to do in listening to what was said to them by Mr. and Mrs. Elkins, who respectively occupied the places of honour next their entertainers at the two ends of the table. Thus it came to pass that the conversation retained its fragmentary character till dinner was nearly over, and that when a change was at last made it had the very reverse of a harmonising effect.

It was Mr. Elkins who, tired perhaps of being answered in monosyllables by his hostess, made

the first move towards generalising the conversation by asking Austin from the other end of the table :

“Have you had time yet to read the report on the Chorcombe Church School, Mr. Waters ? You will find it well worth your attention.”

“Mrs. Elkins has just been telling me,” said Austin with a deferential glance towards that lady. “Yes, I will make a point of reading it, certainly.”

“I am sure you will find yourself well repaid,” put in Mrs. Elkins. “And Mrs. and Miss Waters—I hope they will find time to look at it too.”

Mrs. Waters and Emmy murmured something or other, and Mr. Elkins resumed :

“The result is undoubtedly gratifying when compared with the smallness of the means. It is not all I could wish, of course—very, very far from it, but considering how scantily supported we have hitherto been, I think we have reason to be satisfied. At least it is a proof of what might be done if sufficient funds were forthcoming.”

The reverend speaker looked rather hard at

Austin, but before the latter was able to reply Mr. Tovey struck in.

"It will all come in time—all come in time, you may be sure," he said oracularly. "The great mass of middle-class parishioners will gradually become interested—the class which profits by the movement, and which consequently ought to pay for it—and then the thing is done. There are Mr. Dormer's schools at Yeston—you know the Rev. Mr. Dormer, of course?"

Mr. Elkins drily signified that he did.

"The way they are getting on now is something surprising, and they were in a most discouraging state for years. I have heard a good deal about them first and last, you see, because of the new school-house. The pride Mr. Dormer takes in that new school-house, to be sure!"

"If the school prospers, I cumber myself little about the school-house," said Mrs. Elkins with some asperity.

"Oh! the school is the principal thing, no doubt," said Mr. Tovey blandly. "Though Mr. Dormer says it is quite wonderful the impulse that has been given to the zeal of parents

and pupils by the erection of a building with some little pretensions to architectural fitness."

"If I were Mr. Dormer I would not give much for the zeal evoked by causes so ridiculously inadequate," said Mrs. Elkins sternly. "It seems to me that it is the substance and not the shadow that we ought to consider, and for my part I would not, if I could, change our simple unadorned building" (the school-house at Chorcombe was little better than a big barn) "for that frivolous red-brick doll's house of Mr. Dormer's. Let the children be gathered and taught in a place large enough for the purpose, and I care not what that place is like."

"Oh! of course if mere utilitarianism is to be the order of the day," responded Mr. Tovey, getting all at once very red in the face. "Only in that case there is nothing to be said but that all art has been a mistake from the beginning of the world."

"Instead of which, art, properly considered, is simply the most potent popular educator that we have," said Mr. D'Almayne, who had been listening with evident symptoms of impatience. "If the great proprietors of the country could

only be brought to understand the boon conferred on a neighbourhood by a good collection of old masters, we should in a few years see a general refinement of public taste——”

“At the expense of what I should consider a most culpable waste of private funds,” interrupted the clergyman’s wife. “Our great proprietors have no business to throw away money on pictures while there are so many unsupported missions to the poor and the heathen.”

“A picture-gallery *is* a mission to the poor and the heathen,” rejoined Mr. D’Almayne courageously. “If you could only have been at Llewellyn Court as I was last week, and seen the universal respect in which that family is held all throughout the district——”

“Sir Llewellyn Llewellyn’s place, do you mean?” asked Mr. Tovey. “Ah yes! I remember seeing it once—pity the house was such a ramshackle old concern. The greatest jumble of styles you ever saw in your life, Miss Waters.”

“That may be or may not,” said Mr. D’Almayne with a shrug of the shoulders. “It was the pictures Sir Llewellyn cared about, not the house that held them.”

"A very strange inversion of ideas on Sir Llewellyn's part, that's all," said Mr. Tovey, with something less than his usual blandness.

"As for that, it belongs to the old question of the relative claims of pictorial and architectural art, and seeing that that question has been long ago decided in favour of pictorial——"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Tovey. "There I must venture to disagree with you. What does common sense tell us? Pictures could be done without altogether, are of no intrinsic use whatever, whereas architecture——"

"As you said yourself, Mr. Tovey, there are things not to be decided by the standard of utilitarianism, rather indeed by the opposite. If the architect is to be called superior to the painter because he is more useful, then must the baker and butcher be put before both of them."

As he delivered himself of this argument, Mr. D'Almayne shook back his long dark locks with the air of one who deems his triumph beyond challenge. He had indeed triumphed for the moment, but Mr. Tovey was up again immediately, attacking at another point.

"Well, pictures have been of little enough use

to Sir Llewellyn, that's one thing clear, and I suppose he thinks so too now that they have ruined him."

It was Mr. D'Almayne's turn now to look a little disconcerted, but he also quickly recovered himself.

"Seeing that pictures constituted the only solid part of his property, it is difficult to understand how he can have been ruined by them," was the somewhat sophistical reply. "I am not aware of the exact circumstances which led to Sir Llewellyn's reverse of fortune, but I should say it was much more probably caused by some of those visionary speculations which——"

"Ah! when will people learn that there is only one place where they may lay up their treasures and be afraid of no loss?" said Mrs. Elkins sententiously.

"I don't know altogether about that," remarked Mr. D'Almayne, slightly frowning at the interruption. "He paid a large sum away last year to a local church extension fund which some people seem to think accelerated the catastrophe."



"He was ruined somehow among the lot of 'em at all events," growled Mr. Podmore, without looking up from a plateful of ice pudding on which he was engaged.

"He! he!" sniggered Mr. Frisby.

Such is a specimen of the conversation which, once begun, went on with little or no control from the host and hostess, until at last the time came for Mrs. Waters to give the ladies the signal of withdrawal. It need hardly be said that the poor woman, half stunned between the confusion of so many conflicting sentiments and the responsibilities of her own position, was only too thankful when this point was reached and passed, nor was even Emmy sorry to find the evening so far advanced. For somehow Emmy had not enjoyed herself quite so much as she had expected when she so uncompromisingly voted for the exclusion of John Thwaites.

Perhaps Olivia saw something of Emmy's dissatisfaction, and took it upon herself to guess that John Thwaites's absence might have more or less to do with it. However this may have been, shortly after the move into the drawing-

room she found an opportunity of engaging Emmy in a little private conversation.

"Well, Emmy dear!" she said, coming up to where the girl was sitting a little apart from the rest, bending over a portfolio of engravings.

"Well, Miss Egerton?" said Emmy, looking up smiling into her friend's face. As she did so, she remembered that that friend was, though unconsciously, her future aunt, and the idea was so strange that she felt as if she should never get familiar with it.

"We are spending a very pleasant evening. But what has become of Mr. Thwaites? I made sure I should have the pleasure of seeing him."

But though Emmy had just been thinking how dull it was without John Thwaites, she would hardly let it appear to Olivia that she had noticed whether John Thwaites was there or not.

"Mr. Thwaites! Oh! I don't know where he is, I'm sure. I—I rather think he was not asked this evening."

"Not asked! Oh! Emmy, how did that come about? He was not forgotten, I know."

"Oh! well—I can't say—that is, I fancy his name was mentioned. But of course one has not room for everybody at one's table."

"I think room ought to have been made for John Thwaites, Emmy."

"I don't see why," said Emmy pouting. "One would say you thought it impossible for anybody to exist without John Thwaites."

Olivia laid her hand kindly on Emmy's shoulder.

"You know very well what I think, dear—of him and of you too. Try to be a little less flinty, Emmy—don't pretend to be more flinty than you are, at least; you will find yourself a great deal happier."

Emmy tossed her head.

"I am very happy already—quite as happy as I ever want to be. And I never had such a charming evening as this in all my life."

Olivia smiled at her, rather sorrowfully, however.

"You won't be advised? Well, well, I won't tease you more just now. There is Mrs. Elkins looking as if she wanted somebody to talk to."

Emmy felt a little sorry when the kind hand was withdrawn from her shoulder, and was half disposed to ask herself whether Miss Egerton's advice might not be worth listening to, after all. But she immediately recollected what a bungle Miss Egerton had made of her own affairs, drifting into an engagement with a returned felon when she might have had her choice of the best gentlemen in the county, and she could not help feeling the force of Miss Egerton's authority considerably weakened. Miss Egerton was no longer a person to be altogether looked up to, but to be a little pitied as well. Poor dear Miss Egerton!

Soon after this the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, and another stage of the evening was entered upon. Concerning this stage there is not a great deal to relate. The guests grouped themselves about the room as best they could, talking much the same kind of talk as they had talked before, and displaying much the same individual tendencies, if anything developed and intensified by a good dinner. That is to say, Mr. D'Almayne was perhaps slightly more eloquent about high art, Mr. and Mrs. El-

kins a trifle more zealous about their schools and missions, Mr. Tovey a little more energetic in criticising architectural shortcomings, and Mr. Podmore a shade sulkier. In the same way, it may be added, Mr. Frisby had become if possible yet more retiring and unobtrusive. It would indeed be difficult to do justice to the propriety of this gentleman's demeanour. While others—the D'Almaynes and Toveys and Elkinses—showed a disposition to monopolise the attention of their host, and even to elbow each other in a gentlemanlike manner out of the way, Mr. Frisby kept himself so studiously in the background that probably it did not occur to one of these to regard him in any sort as a rival.

And yet Mr. Podmore was still unmollified. Grimly and sternly, speaking no word to any one, he stalked about the room, examining the water-colours on the walls severely through his gold eye-glass; grimly and sternly he drank down three cups of tea; and, this done, more grimly and sternly still did he go through the ceremony of leave-taking with his entertainers and those others of the party with whom it

pleased him to acknowledge an acquaintance-ship. But among those was not Mr. Frisby, whom he passed on his way to the door without recognising him by so much as the quivering of a muscle.

It was evident that poor Mr. Frisby both noticed and felt the slight. He happened to be standing near the door when Austin returned to the room after seeing Mr. Podmore out, and as he caught his host's eye shook his head, though meekly, very sadly.

"It is strange what I can have done to give Mr. Podmore such offence, is it not, sir? That is the way he always treats me."

"It is a confoundedly rude way, then," said Austin, who on his own account was disposed to resent Mr. Podmore's behaviour not a little.

"It is rather rude for one professional man towards another, I must say. And what can be the cause of offence I have really no idea. I happen to have been successful in one or two little cases lately which I have had to conduct against Mr. Podmore, but that can hardly be called a fault, can it now, sir?"

"Certainly not, but only a misfortune—Mr

Podmore's misfortune, eh?" said Austin, laughing at his own wit.

"He! he! he! Excuse me, sir, but how very good! And then I fancy perhaps I may have offended Mr. Podmore with reference to this scheme of the Beacon Bay railway; he is very much opposed to the project, you are aware, whereas what little influence I possess—By the way, I heard something about that matter the other day that I think might interest you, only with so many in the room I don't exactly like—I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes in private? oh! not just now, but when everybody has gone away and you are quite at leisure."

"You are very kind, Mr. Frisby. If it does not inconvenience you to wait so long——"

"Don't mention such a thing, sir—only too happy, I am sure."

And, falling obsequiously back, Mr. Frisby instantly relapsed into his former obscurity. There he continued to remain, undistinguished and unenvied, till the conclusion of the evening, nobody suspecting that during those few seconds of low-toned conversation with the mas-

ter of the house he had performed a stroke of business with which he was eminently gratified.

The conclusion of the evening arrived in due time, Olivia and Mrs. Waddilove being summoned away by the announcement of Miss Eger-ton's carriage, and the Elkinses following shortly afterwards. When these had departed, Mr. D'Almayne and Mr. Tovey still lingered a little while, neither liking to go away leaving the other behind him, but not bestowing a thought on the modest Mr. Frisby, who was demurely hanging about the room as though lacking courage to make his adieux. At last Mr. Tovey looked at Mr. D'Almayne, and remarked that it was very late; and Mr. D'Almayne, understanding that a compromise was the best policy, agreed with him, and the two went away together. Probably they scarcely noticed that they left Mr. Frisby hanging about the room still.

"Come and have a cigar in the smoking-room before you go, Mr. Frisby," said Austin carelessly, for somehow he did not wish his wife and daughter to think that an interview



with the lawyer had been pre-arranged.

“You are very good, sir. I shall be most happy.”

And then, having politely taken leave of the ladies, Mr. Frisby followed his entertainer to the smoking-room.

## CHAPTER X.

*Mr. Frisby gives Advice Gratis.*

“DO you prefer mild or full-flavoured?” was Austin’s first question on finding himself alone with his guest. He did not forget that he had come to the smoking-room in order to hear something about the Beacon Bay railway, but, impatient though he was to hear what that something might be, he felt himself restrained by the etiquette of hospitality from plunging directly into the subject.

“Mild, if it is all the same to you, please, sir,” answered Mr. Frisby, and indeed from the gentle humility of his manners one would have said that nothing could be mild enough for him.

“Then here are some that I think you will find very choice, some that I picked up a bar-

gain, to tell you the truth, while I was staying at the Brown Bear—a tobacconist's traveller who sold me a box quite as a favour.

"They are beautiful large ones indeed, sir."

"Yes, I think they look good, don't they? And now I will just ring for something, and then we shall be quite comfortable. Take a chair, Mr. Frisby, pray."

Mr. Frisby lingered an instant till Austin should be ready to join him, and then both seated themselves simultaneously, and set about lighting their cigars. In another minute the something had been brought, and host and guest were left together, secure from all further interruption. Austin thought the time had come for satisfying his impatience.

"By the way, about that Beacon Bay railway—I think you said you had something to tell me——"

"Ah yes! to be sure. Well, it isn't very much, but it is satisfactory as showing how certain the thing is to be done. It was just this; I was in company with one of the Directors the other day—you will excuse me from mentioning names, I am sure—and somebody happened

to allude to the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate, and——well, in fact (you know how people will talk, Mr. Waters), there was a little speculation as to what the price might have been. So I said I had heard a hundred and fifty thousand, and somebody remarked wasn't that rather dear, but this gentleman—the Director, I mean—just shook his head and smiled, and said it would have been cheap at three times the money. That looks as if the Board had pretty well made up their minds, doesn't it, sir?"

If Austin had been less pleased with the drift of this anecdote than he was, it might have occurred to him that the story was neither so long nor of so confidential a character as to necessitate a private interview for its narration. But as it was, he thought of nothing except his own gratification in hearing his most sanguine calculations thus justified.

"I always knew it would turn out well," he said after a sip of brandy and water. "I was never such a fool as to let myself be frightened—no, not for one half-minute, I can tell you."

"I should think not indeed, sir. In fact I

don't know who ever was frightened about it, unless perhaps Mr. Podmore, and that can only have been at a time when he happened to be abnormally nervous."

"Abnormally nervous! He's always abnormally nervous," grumbled Austin, puffing fiercely at his cigar.

"For my own part I must confess that I never had but one opinion on the subject, and that was that the Beacon Bay estate was just the investment for a man of property and position to make. Of course it is a lock-up of capital for the time being, we all know that, but then some people can afford to lock up capital, and even if they could not, it is so easy in these days to balance any temporary decrease of income in one direction by an increase in another, that really it comes to much the same thing."

Mr. Frisby ceased, and smoked away gently for a few seconds, during which he turned his keen black eyes once or twice observantly towards his companion, as though expecting something in the way of reply or remark. But Austin was too much occupied with his own thoughts to give any other answer than a mut-

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tered "Of course;" and after waiting a due time Mr. Frisby went on again:

"Yes, that's my view of it, and always has been. I have heard some people say that with so much capital locked up it would be impossible for the remaining income to stand the drain of the outlay necessary to make the purchase productive, but I have always answered: 'Sir, that just proves that you don't understand what an elastic thing now-a-days income is.' Not that I blame them for that, of course, for perhaps nobody but a lawyer in full practice, with golden opportunities of investment constantly passing through his hands, can properly understand it."

Austin looked rather puzzled, but still did not answer. After a few meditative puffs, Mr. Frisby once more resumed:

"But then people ought not to talk about things they don't understand, ought they, sir? There was a gentleman in my office this morning saying the most absurd things on this very subject—it made me quite angry to hear him—that you hadn't half capital enough to make the speculation pay, or some rubbish of that sort.

So I just told him plainly: 'Sir,' I said, 'you don't know what you are speaking about. Mr. Waters's property came to him, I believe, tied up in the Three Per Cents and guaranteed railway stock'—it was rather a liberty of me to talk so perhaps, only I was so nettled at the time I really could not help it—'but,' I said, 'you may depend that Mr. Podmore has by this time given him advice as to investments which has had the effect of doubling or trebling the returns. Mr. Podmore may be a little uncertain in his temper, but I am positive that no feeling of personal pique would prevent him from doing his duty to a client under all circumstances.' I spoke out so plainly that I am afraid the gentleman was a little offended with me, only it is always best to speak one's mind, I suppose."

Again Austin muttered "Of course," but did not immediately say anything more. He understood now what was meant by elasticity of income, and felt much interested in the subject, yet was restrained from following it up at once by a notion that there would somehow be a theoretical imprudence in holding a conversation about investments with an attorney of Mr.

Frisby's dubious professional and social standing. There was therefore a pretty long silence, which, however, gradually began to suggest to Austin that, as Mr. Frisby was evidently willing to let the topic fall through, its imaginary dangers must be wholly non-existent. And then besides, was not forewarned forearmed? So, taking another sip of brandy and water while he collected his ideas, he guardedly remarked :

“Not that Mr. Podmore ever did give me any advice of the kind, you know.”

Mr. Frisby was manifestly surprised.

“Did he not, sir? Oh! but he will, you may depend upon it he will. He is a little out of sorts just now about this Beacon Bay business, but I am certain he is not the man to let his temper stand in the way of a client's interests. With everything going up so fast as it is too—oh! you may be sure he will, and lose no time about it either.”

“I'm pretty sure he won't though.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Waters, I can feel no doubt about it. I will tell you what may have been the cause of delay hitherto; Mr. Podmore, belonging rather to what we may call the old

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school, may be a little less in the way of hearing of opportunities than solicitors in a more modern line of business, and it naturally takes him longer to look out. But the best that he can do he will do, I am confident."

"But I tell you I know he won't," said Austin impatiently, for this defence of Mr. Podmore was very provoking to him. "He doesn't approve of such things, or pretends not—I was talking to him about it only the other day, and he told me his motto was 'High interest is another name for bad security,' or something like that."

Mr. Frisby elevated his eyebrows half with contempt, half with surprise and almost incredulity.

"A motto I used to write in my copy-books when I was a small boy," he observed. "I declare it is quite refreshing to hear it again, for I don't think I have ever come across it since. But, my dear sir, you are doing Mr. Podmore an injustice, I am sure. He was joking when he said that."

"No, he wasn't," said Austin gruffly.

"Oh! but indeed I feel convinced that he

must have been. That is a principle completely obsolete now among men of business, I do assure you. The saying may have been true once, I shouldn't wonder, like a great many other Goody Two-shoes sayings we used to write in our copy-books long ago, like the proverb about early to bed and early to rise, for instance—that may have been true once upon a time, perhaps. And indeed I dare say it's true still that early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, but it's quite certain that it don't make him wealthy or wise, because it is precisely the rich classes and the studious classes that keep the latest hours—he! he! And it is the same with the other old saw—an exploded fallacy quite. Oh! take my word for it, Mr. Podmore was joking."

"But damn it, I say I know he was not joking," exclaimed Austin, beginning to lose his temper under the continued contradiction.

Mr. Frisby, quite cowed by this display of impetuosity, had nothing for it but to yield the point.

"Was he not really, sir?" he answered meekly. "Well, well, who would have thought it, to

be sure? So far behind the times—it seems so very strange.”

And then, having finished his cigar, he sat stirring his brandy and water in contemplative silence. It was getting late, and, as for some time nothing further was said on either side, it might have seemed that the opportunity was a good one for going away, or at least for taking the preliminary step towards going away by finishing the brandy and water. But Mr. Frisby did neither.

After a while Austin felt it incumbent on him as host to say something to keep up the conversation, especially after the acrimoniousness with which he had last spoken. And then the conversation really interested him.

“I suppose you are often hearing of some goodish thing in the way of investment, Mr. Frisby,” he said with a diplomatically assumed air of indifference, for, as has been shown, he was thoroughly on his guard.

“Oh! well, all lawyers with any practice hear more or less of such things, of course,” said Mr. Frisby modestly.

“And now what kind of things may they be?”

went on Austin, still with the same appearance of carelessness. "Can't you give us one or two examples?"

He was afraid just at first that he might have gone a little too far, but he was instantly relieved by the answer, and made slightly self-reproachful as well.

"You must excuse me there, if you please, sir. Nothing could afford me more pleasure than to serve you in any way in my power, but I could not bear to do anything that might seem invidious to Mr. Podmore. Mr. Podmore, it appears, disapproves of all but old-fashioned speculations, and Mr. Podmore being your professional adviser——"

"Never mind Mr. Podmore," said Austin surlyly. "And let me tell you, I'm not tied to Mr. Podmore or anybody else as a professional adviser as you call it."

"Oh! sir, but I hope you have no idea——"

"Never mind that. Come, Mr. Frisby, you can give a plain answer to a plain question, surely. What is your notion of a good investment at the present moment?"

"Well, as you insist," said Mr. Frisby reluc-

tantly. "But really it is a very difficult question to answer. There are so many good things in the market—what I should call good things at least. There is the Madagascar Canal Company, paying fourteen per cent., with the guarantee of the native Government; and there is the Otaheite Gas, with a paid-up capital of fifty thousand, and ten per cent. shares doing at eighty-four and a quarter ex div. Then there is the Posthumous Insurance Company, on the new principle of payment of premiums by survivors after getting their money, instead of by poor devils beforehand who know they will never live to get it at all—a very good idea, and certain to take with the public; and there is the Sahara Irrigation Company, and the Palace of Art Company—all first-class undertakings, thoroughly sound and highly remunerative."

"I am much obliged to you for your information," said Austin warily. "I am not thinking of anything of the sort just now exactly, you understand, but a few facts never come amiss, do they? Let me see, would you favour me with the names again?" here he produced a note-book and pencil.

The lawyer once more enumerated his list of desirable investments, which Austin duly jotted down. The note-book was on the point of being put up again, when Mr. Frisby subjoined, speaking very slowly and hesitatingly, as though the words were being dragged from him against his will :

“These are all pretty good things, sir, but I would not say that they are the very best I know of. I will not deceive you—there is something better than any of these—But we will say no more about it, if you please. I just thought I would mention the subject, so that if you should ever hear anything about it afterwards you might not think I had said that which was not.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Austin, looking at him rather suspiciously. “If you know of anything better, why didn’t you tell me at first?”

“Because I am not sure how far I am justified—Forget that I ever said a word about it, if you please, sir. These other investments are all of a very superior character, I do assure you.”

"What the devil——Come, I didn't mean that, but seriously you must be a little more explicit. This is not treating me well, really it isn't."

"I feel it is not, but still——Oh dear! I must explain now, I suppose. The fact is, Mr. Waters, in this concern to which I am alluding there are only a limited number of shares remaining to be disposed of, and as I have one or two clients just now for whom I have promised to look out first-class investments, I feel it would be hardly fair to recommend to any one else——"

"Well, but this wouldn't be recommending exactly. I only want you to mention the particulars, just to give me an idea of things, you know."

But Mr. Frisby shook his head, and murmured something about "duty." Austin, thus persistently balked, began to wax very resentful.

"Upon my word, this is infernally unreasonable," he exclaimed testily.

The mild Mr. Frisby winced—it was as though he had not courage to confront Austin in his wrath.

“Don’t say that, Mr. Waters. Well, if it is really to offend you, I suppose——after all, one has a right to consult one’s own feelings sometimes, and as you say this is not like a recommendation. What I was referring to, then, was the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, Limited, starting with a paid-up capital of eight hundred thousand, and guaranteed dividend of fifteen per cent. There are a few shares not yet allotted, a thousand or so, I fancy; hundred-pound shares with twenty pounds to pay up on each—about twenty thousand pounds’ worth altogether that is, yielding a net income to a purchaser or purchasers of three thousand a year at the least, fifteen per cent. being the minimum dividend. Some people talk of thirty, but I don’t suppose anything like that will come just for the first year or two.”

“And are you sure it is quite safe?” said Austin, looking a good deal impressed.

“Safe! it is simply the safest thing I ever came across. And then it is limited liability, you know.”

“Ah! to be sure,” said Austin pensively.



“So if the worst came to the worst——”

“If the worst came to the worst, one couldn’t lose more than the value of one’s own shares. But you wouldn’t talk of the worst coming to the worst if you knew the principles on which the undertaking is based. I have seen a good deal of business first and last, and I may safely say I never met anything so completely commending itself to my judgment. Perhaps you might like to look at the prospectus, sir. I think I have one somewhere.”

And after a little fumbling the lawyer produced from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he deferentially handed to Austin, adding :

“May I beg that you will kindly keep the document strictly under lock and key ? There are some clients of mine with whom I might get into serious difficulty if they had any suspicion of that prospectus reaching you through my hands. They might fancy it was in the way of recommendation, whereas I am sure you quite understand, Mr. Waters, that I am only showing it to you as a kind of standard of what a good investment ought to be—as a kind of ideal rather, for I don’t suppose there is any

other at present quite equal to this one. You do entirely understand, do you not, sir?"

"Oh! entirely," said Austin, and then applied himself to the study of the prospectus.

Here again, one might have thought, was a good opportunity for Mr. Frisby to take leave. He had said what he had originally been asked into that room to say, he had enjoyed a high-priced cigar, and a tolerable allowance of brandy and water, he had moreover repaid these hospitalities by a great deal of useful information—and what more could he have to wait for? But nevertheless Mr. Frisby did wait.

Austin spent some time over the prospectus. It was a very glowing one, and he could not help being considerably struck, not to say absolutely convinced, by its arguments. Still he had not lost sight of the necessity of prudence in matters connected with business, and resolved to proceed, if he proceeded at all, very cautiously. He laid down the paper with great deliberation, and, having gained yet further time for himself by replenishing his now empty glass and pushing the tray towards his friend, he demanded thoughtfully:

“Supposing now I had any idea of this investment for myself—not that I have at present, you know, not in the least, but there is no saying what I might take into my head after a few days for consideration and consultation with friends—just supposing I did think of such a thing, you could undertake to manage it for me, no doubt?”

Mr. Frisby was for a moment quite bewildered with surprise.

“I! For you, do you mean, sir? Dear me! I am quite ashamed of looking so stupid, but I was so unprepared—Well, as you ask, I must answer of course, but I am afraid—You must excuse me, sir, if you please; the more I consider the matter, the more I see it won’t do. For myself I should be only too happy to serve you, but then only think of the construction that Mr. Podmore might put upon it. I could not bear any appearance of meddling between another professional gentleman and one of his clients.”

“Bother Mr. Podmore!” wrathfully commented Austin, on whom the very name was beginning to have an irritant effect, “let him put

what construction on it he likes. And as for my being one of his clients, why, if he don't mind what he's about I shan't be one of his clients long, that's all."

"Oh! Mr. Waters, nothing could grieve me more than to hear——"

"Come, let's have no more nonsense about that. Are you willing to oblige me in this little matter, or are you not?"

Mr. Frisby, thus driven into a corner, paused an instant in visible hesitation. Apparently he tried hard to refuse, but could not bring himself to do such outrage to his feelings.

"If you absolutely insist, sir," he faltered at last.

"That's right," said Austin, put into good humour again by the victory. "Then if within the next two or three days I make up my mind and send you word, it will do, I suppose?"

"I shall be delighted to oblige you, I'm sure. But—but——" Again Mr. Frisby showed symptoms of an inner struggle, in which, however, this time duty seemed to prevail against feeling, for he went on, in firmer and more assured tones: "I have to make one reservation,

“sir, and that is in case I should in the meanwhile receive prior instructions from one of those clients to whom I have already recommended the undertaking. I could not otherwise feel that I was doing my duty, really I could not, Mr. Waters.”

This hitch in the negotiation chafed Austin not a little.

“Pooh ! you don’t mean that seriously, surely.”

“Indeed but I do,” said Mr. Frisby sadly, “I could not else be happy in my mind. If a client—one whose interests I am bound to consider as my own—were to come to me with instructions, say for a thousand shares, how could I have the face to tell him that he must wait for the decision of a gentleman to whom I had subsequently mentioned the subject ? I could not ; it is no use to talk of it. We must just hope that the contingency may not occur—but I will be candid with you, sir, I have no confidence that it will not. The competition is very keen.”

Mr. Frisby spoke so firmly that further argument or persuasion was evidently altogether useless. Austin sat silent for a while, endeavouring

to get over his annoyance as best he could. It was really extremely provoking, this uncertainty about the completion of an investment which was manifestly the exact thing he had been looking for—the rare advantages of which indeed this very uncertainty conclusively proved. As he reflected on all the chances intervening between him and the golden prize, the conviction grew upon him that one mode, and one only, existed of obtaining it.

“If I gave my order to-night, you would consider I had the prior claim in that case, would you not?”

The words had no sooner left his lips than he was a little dismayed at his own apparent imprudence. Was it not possible that this was the point to which Mr. Frisby had been endeavouring to lead him up? But in the next moment his unworthy suspicions were dissipated like chaff before the wind.

“Sir, you must forgive me, but I must decline to receive instructions on the subject to-night. I feel it to be due to myself that you should not on my suggestion enter into a transaction of so momentous a nature without

further time for consideration and inquiry.”

“What ridiculous nonsense!” remonstrated Austin, now quite restored to confidence in Mr. Frisby and himself. “If I am satisfied, I think that ought to be enough for you.”

“I am very sorry, sir, but I cannot see it in that light. So unusual a deviation from my ordinary practice——no, you must really excuse me.”

“Then let me tell you, Mr. Frisby, you are behaving damned unfair,” said Austin, with a burst of natural indignation as he recalled his grievances. “You tell me in one breath that you will let me go to the wall if you get an order from somebody else before I make up my mind——”

“I should be compelled in duty to my clients,” murmured Mr. Frisby apologetically.

“And in the next you refuse my order when I am ready to give it you. I say it is infamously unjust.”

Mr. Frisby looked rather shaken at this.

“There is something in that, perhaps. Only——”

“Only I’ll tell you what, Mr. Frisby, you have

no right to let my interests suffer from your absurd scruples. I give you that order, and I expect you to execute it."

The lawyer heaved a resigned sigh.

"I will execute it then. Yes, I suppose I have no honourable choice. You are sure you really wish it, Mr. Waters?"

"Wish it—of course I wish it."

"And how many shares would you like to have?" asked Mr. Frisby, sighing again. "Not the whole thousand or eleven hundred that are in the market?"

"I don't see why not. Do you mean to say you shouldn't advise it?"

"I should advise it certainly, under ordinary circumstances. But I am afraid it looks so very invidious, my entering into an affair of such magnitude at so short a notice——"

"Oh! if that's all, never mind that. Buy up everything you can get, and don't bother your head about anything else."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Frisby meekly. And then with a depressed air he finished his brandy and water, after which he mechanically looked at his watch.



"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed, rising in great trepidation, "I had no notion of its being so late. I'm sure how I am ever to apologise for trespassing on you so long—Good night, sir—no, no, not another moment. And with reference to that little affair, you are quite certain you will not change your mind?"

"Really, Mr. Frisby, I consider it no compliment——"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I will not breathe another word on the subject. The thing shall be settled for you to-morrow. And now positively I must say good-night—no, pray don't trouble yourself, I can find my way quite well."

But the master of the house insisted on seeing his guest into the hall, where, with many friendly adieux on both sides, the final parting took place. As Austin closed the door on his new friend, and thought of all that had been done since they entered the smoking-room together, he experienced a momentary return of the uncomfortable doubts which had already assailed him more than once that evening. There was no question that an important decision had been arrived at with a suddenness which had a *primâ*

*facie* appearance of imprudence. Could it be that he had weakly allowed himself to be drawn on——But then he remembered that, so far from having been drawn on, he had had a separate battle to fight at every stage of the transaction, and plainly perceived that it must be all right. The prospectus of the new Company was still lying on the table when he re-entered the room, and, remembering the splendour of its promises, he felt not only re-assured but triumphant. He drank off the rest of his brandy and water, and went to bed in an extra cheerful mood.

Somebody else also went to bed in an extra cheerful mood that night. This was Mr. Frisby, and it must be said that for Mr. Frisby's cheerfulness there was good cause. He had secured twenty thousand pounds and upwards for the coffers of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, and the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company allowed a commission of ten per cent. to enterprising agents who extended its connexion.

## CHAPTER XL.

*Moving On.*

AUSTIN did not awake next morning in quite the same happy frame of mind in which he had gone to bed. The idea of the twenty thousand pounds' worth of Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan shares which he stood committed to purchase was the first that presented itself to him on opening his eyes, and he was so dismayed at his own precipitation that at first he was almost tempted to wish that that conversation in the smoking-room had not taken place at all. From this extreme state of depression he gradually recovered as he recalled the considerations by which he had been decided ; but even when, by a recapitulation of these, he had succeeded in thoroughly convincing his reason of the perfect prudence of the transaction, he still did not

find himself so entirely comfortable in his feelings as might have been expected. He had no doubt done quite right in this particular case, but was it not a mistake on abstract grounds to take any important step with so little time for reflection? What would be thought of the proceeding by business men, by Mr. Podmore, for instance? He was so haunted by this question of what Mr. Podmore would think if he knew, that it was perhaps fortunate for his self-complacency that on that very day an interview took place which had the effect of destroying with him for the time being the last vestige of Mr. Podmore's authority.

It happened that some detail of the routine business relating to the winding-up of Uncle Gilbert's affairs took Austin that afternoon to Mr. Podmore's office. The client, perhaps from something of inner doubt and self-distrust, was in a more than usually pliant and courteous mood, but the lawyer was as dry and frigid as it is possible even for a lawyer to be. He seemed at first hardly to understand what Austin could have come about, and, when this was explained to him, remarked stiffly, fingering the while with

an air of dignified impatience the rustling leaves of a document on which the visitor had found him engaged :

“Perhaps, Mr. Waters, it would be better for the future that your legal business should be transacted through another channel. The arrangement would be more satisfactory doubtless to yourself, and I confess that it would be much more so to me.”

Austin’s countenance fell. He had for some time professed to himself and his intimates an utter want of confidence in Mr. Podmore, and had even talked pretty freely of giving him up some day. But notwithstanding his professions of want of confidence, he knew that his present lawyer was the person whom all the rich people and landed proprietors of the neighbourhood employed in their legal affairs as a matter of course, and he had not yet been prepared so far to separate himself from the rest of his class as to break through the Podmore connexion altogether. And then it is one thing to give up, and another thing to be given up.

“Oh! Mr. Podmore, surely you don’t mean —What nonsense, to be sure!” (Mr. Podmore

slightly drew himself up). "A man may ask a person to dinner—just as a private friend, you know—without wanting to take his business out of another person's hands."

"I should prefer it to be as I have said, Mr. Waters, if you please. It is natural that you should feel more confidence in the advice of one whom you regard as a private friend than in any that I can give, and indeed from what I have seen of the very small weight which my opinion possesses with you, I cannot but think it a pity for your sake as well as my own that you should trouble yourself to ascertain it."

"What! just because I didn't take your advice about the Beacon Bay estate, do you mean? Come, that is being very hard, upon my word it is. I didn't do it to offend you, you know I didn't, but you may be mistaken in your advice sometimes like other people, and you can't expect a man out of mere civility to give up an investment that may make him a millionaire half-a-dozen times over."

Mr. Podmore only answered by a smile—a smile, however, expressive of such sovereign

contempt and incredulity that Austin felt his choler stirred at once.

"I can assure you, Mr. Podmore, it is perfectly true. It was only yesterday I was told on the best authority that the railway was quite determined on, and that the Board themselves consider my investment as the very finest ever entered into."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Podmore, raising his eyebrows. "That information somewhat differs from my own, but on your account I am very glad to hear it."

"And pray what may your information be, Mr. Podmore?" demanded Austin in growing indignation.

"As you ask, I heard that at the last meeting of the Board there was a great deal of disagreement on the subject, and that in the end the whole question was adjourned *sine die*. But \* possibly I may have been misinformed."

"Possibly you may," sneered Austin, for the exhibition of so much obstinacy, ignorance, and folly had fairly broken down his self-restraint, "possibly you may. And possibly the wish may have been father to the thought, Mr. Pod-

more; possibly you think there will be no railway because you wish that there may be none. Oh! I know very well you have always been against it."

"I am against all things which cost money in the making and which I don't think have any chance of paying when they are made," said Mr. Podmore, shrugging his shoulders. "But really I must again say that I do not perceive the utility of your asking my opinion on this or any other subject."

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Podmore, I really don't see it either."

"I suppose then there is nothing more to be said," rejoined the lawyer, with a slight contraction of the brows, but still fingering his papers with calm dignity.

"I suppose not," said Austin, taking up his hat.

He made his adieux with scanty ceremony, and straightway shook the dust of Mr. Podmore's office from his feet, bending his steps homeward in a state of wrath which tended more to restore him to self-satisfaction than perhaps anything else could have done. And



so that absurd old fool persisted in making out there would be no railway, did he? Much he knew about it indeed! Why, had not Mr. Tovey proved over and over again to demonstration that the Beacon Bay Extension would just be the most paying line, or portion of a line, in the kingdom, and was it likely the Directors would not understand what was good for them quite as well as Mr. Tovey could do? Then had not Mr. Frisby brought positive information showing that the Directors had not only understood their own interests, but were determined to act on that understanding? had not Mr. Frisby from the first declared the purchase of the Beacon Bay estate the best investment of the age? And Mr. Frisby had no imaginable motive for saying so if he did not think it; on the contrary, the speculation not being recommended by him, his interests seemed rather to lie in undervaluing it—that was quite a conceivable trick, and one which he, Austin, would have seen through in a moment. But instead of that, Mr. Frisby, enlightened man of business and of the world as he was, had hardly been able to find words strong enough to express his

admiration of the enterprise. How conclusively this proved his superiority over an old antediluvian like Podmore, with his cant about high interest and bad security forsooth! Oh yes! it was impossible that any mistake could have been made in taking the advice of such a man in that matter of the Anglo-Cosmopolitan or in any other. A blessed change indeed to have got rid of a Podmore (only fancy the pompous humbug presuming to turn him off!) and to have secured the services of a Frisby.

And so cheering did Austin find these and similar reflections that by the time he reached home he was once more in capital spirits.

Sustained partly by his ire against Mr. Podmore, partly by the representations of Mr. Frisby (now regularly installed as the family lawyer), Austin continued to be in more or less good spirits for some days to come. But unusual elation is proverbially apt to be followed by a re-action, and so it was with Austin now. As the excitement of the scene with Mr. Podmore wore off, as Mr. Frisby's conversation began to lose something of its first novelty, and still no

definite tidings were received of the Beacon Bay railway, the jovial tones of the master's voice became day by day less frequently heard in the household at the Laurels, and a certain care-worn expression of his face, already familiar to his wife and daughter, grew perceptibly more habitual and marked. Not that he admitted any cause for anxiety, nor indeed was any new cause for anxiety in existence. It had always been part of Mr. Tovey's reckoning, and consequently of Austin's, that a decision of the Directors in favour of the new branch might probably be kept secret till the moment at which it should become necessary to take the first practical steps towards its execution, so as to allow as little time as possible for opposition to organise itself. And yet, though Austin had by no means lost sight of this contingency, and was always insisting that he should not be a bit surprised if he had to wait months for a further scrap of good news, there is no doubt that he was on the constant look-out for such news, and that, if it had come, it would have instantaneously enabled him to shake off the dejection into which he had gradually fallen.

But day followed day, week followed week, bringing no word of the Beacon Bay railway, and Austin's dejection still continued, rather indeed became more and more visible. He said there was nothing the matter with him, but it was evident that he took little or no pleasure in anything he did.

All through that summer he remained in much the same listless apathetic state. It was a very busy summer for him, but none of the manifold occupations which it brought seemed to be sufficiently interesting to rouse him to permanent cheerfulness. And yet one would have thought that there was enough going on about him to furnish matter of supreme interest and satisfaction. The plans for the future city of Waterson were fully completed, and such of the works as were already begun were advancing with a rapidity which thrilled Mr. Tovey's bosom with pride and gratification; while nearer home Chorcombe Lodge was developing into a stately pile which more than realised its owner's most ambitious visions. But though Austin duly went over to inspect operations at Beacon Bay as often as he was told that there was any

occasion for his supervision, though he could not but understand that everything was going on there as well as heart could wish, still somehow those visits did not give him pleasure. He could not admire the graceful outlines of the new crescent already beginning to rise from amid a chaos of mud and sand and builders' rubbish, without asking himself when he should hear something of the railway which was to bring down the future population of tenants and lodgers; and though he had an assured conviction that all must and would come right, the question pressed on his brain with a painful weight of anxiety that always made him return from Beacon Bay looking quite ill and miserable. It might have been deemed that the progress of Chorcombe Lodge would at least have been an unalloyed pleasure to him, but such was not the case—brick and mortar at Chorcombe Lodge was too suggestive of brick and mortar at Beacon Bay.

In the midst of this general drooping of his spirits, there was one fact of which he himself felt that it ought to have a reassuring influence, and yet which from some cause or other alto-

gether failed of that effect. This was the increase of income secured by his investment in the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan. The thorough soundness of this enterprise had been demonstrated to him by Mr. Frisby times without number, while a seat on the Board of Direction, which had been conferred on him at the time of his purchase, gave him, as that gentleman pointed out, the amplest opportunities of watching and controlling the administration of the concern whenever he might feel inclined to do so. Still so full was he at present of nervous whims and fantasies that he was sometimes almost uneasy for the safety of the twenty thousand pounds and upwards which he had paid into the undertaking, and every now and then tormented himself with imagining the straits which, with so much money locked up in the Beacon Bay estate, the loss of even so comparatively moderate a sum would put him to.

So passed the summer for Austin, the first summer of his prosperity. And, as may be supposed, the period which went by so gloomily for the head of the family was not a very lively one for his wife and daughter. Not only was it

naturally depressing for them to notice the melancholy which deepened on him day by day; but the diversions which might have tended to raise the spirits of both, and to which Emmy had been looking forward as among the principal privileges of her new position, were from the same cause denied to them. In vain they endeavoured to distract him from his cares by suggestions of change of air and scene; he always alleged want of time for so much as a week's absence from home, while all Emmy's hints as to the desirableness of a little social gaiety were met by a promise of seeing about it in a week or two, which promise was merely repeated when the date of fulfilment arrived. Thus the days and weeks and months went by—very grandly, it is true, with white-headed footmen to assist at all the family doings and comings and goings, but also rather drearily and monotonously. And though Emmy enjoyed the grandeur, the dreariness and monotony so oppressed her that sometimes, with a weary sense of disappointment and hope deferred, she was fain to confess to herself that this summer, so longingly looked forward to, was the

least pleasant of any she had ever known.

At length the summer came to its close—not only the summer properly so called, but the supplementary summer of September and the first half of October, which while it lasts makes the face of nature seem cheerful in spite of yellowing leaves and shortening light. The decay of the year was a fact no longer to be overlooked, and with the approach of the last days of October a touch of wintriness was already beginning to make itself felt in the crisp atmosphere. At this time it was that an event occurred which had the effect, for a while at least, of restoring something like pleasure to Austin's life.

This was the receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Grand Anglo-Cosmopolitan Loan Discount and Universal Assurance Company, enclosing a cheque for fifteen hundred and odd pounds, being the amount of half-yearly dividend on the shares which Austin held in the undertaking. He was very much excited—so much excited that before he could go to announce the news to his wife and daughter he was obliged to steady his nerves by re-



course to a certain cupboard in his library, a cupboard to which he had often had recourse of late at times of more than usual excitement. It would almost have appeared from his agitation that the punctual receipt of his dividend had taken him by surprise.

He was a long time expatiating to Mrs. Waters and Emmy on his wonderful good fortune in being an Anglo-Cosmopolitan shareholder, on the first-rate business abilities of Mr. Frisby who had put him up to the investment, and on the absolute certainty of that other speculation at Beacon Bay, which Mr. Frisby had no less confidently approved, turning out proportionately successful. When he had done descanting thus, he thought of going over to Beacon Bay to see how the works were getting on, but, finding that the afternoon was too far advanced for so long an expedition, decided to pay a visit to Chorcombe Lodge instead.

If Austin was already in good spirits, certainly nothing could have been more calculated yet further to raise them than the appearance which Chorcombe Lodge now presented. The mason and carpenter had done their work, so

that, though the painting and decorations yet remained to be finished, it was possible to judge of the proportions and general effect of the building as a whole. Very splendid that general effect was, and Austin, contemplating it in his present changed frame of mind, could not but feel pride and satisfaction in the reflection that here was his future home. He examined everything in great detail, going over the house from cellar to garret, and asking questions and giving instructions with a particularity which quite astonished the workmen, accustomed for months past to nothing more from him than a mere listless and perfunctory show of interest.

After a long time spent thus, he tore himself away, casting many a backward glance while he went down the rubbish-strewn garden path. He was so occupied in taking a last look as he emerged from the garden into the highway, that he was near coming into collision with a person who, happening to have been passing by, had just stopped at the gate, and was eyeing the new house with an evidently profound, if not somewhat melancholy, interest which prevented him from noticing

Austin till the two were close upon each other.

"Why, Mr. Waters!" stammered this person, suddenly discovering who it was that was so near him.

"Ah! Mr. Thwaites," said Austin, graciously extending a couple of fingers. "How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you," nervously answered John Thwaites, for it was indeed no other. "I—I hope you are the same, Mr. Waters?"

"Oh! never better in my life," said Austin, with a glance behind.

"I am so glad to hear it, sir. And—and the ladies—they are pretty well, I hope?"

Here the poor fellow felt a blush rising to his face which made him wish to hide himself fathoms deep under ground. He might have spared his uneasiness if he had known, for Austin was thinking of the house, and did not trouble himself about John Thwaites's blush.

"The ladies—oh! all right, thank you. So you were taking a look at the building? And what do you think of it?"

"It is very handsome indeed, sir. One of the handsomest houses I ever saw."

“ Well, yes, I think it looks rather well. And if you have not seen it very lately, you notice the difference all the more, of course. Have you been away anywhere this year? It seems a goodish while since we saw you.”

“ It is a little time back,” admitted John, to whom indeed the “ little time ” looked a whole age. But on the two or three occasions on which he had ventured to make a call at the Laurels he had been so depressed by the grandeur he found there, and especially by the grandeur of Emmy’s reception of him, that he had resolved to consult his peace of mind by making as few as possible of such calls in future. “ It is a little time back, but I have not been away—oh no ! ”

“ You must try and look in on us some of these days,” said Austin, with an air of more than usual condescension, for, as has been seen, he was in specially good humour.

“ Thank you, sir, you are very kind,” said John, blushing again, but not feeling very sure whether he would avail himself of the permission.

“ Don’t mention such a thing, Mr. Thwaites,”

returned Austin blandly, and so kindly disposed did he feel towards the young man that he went on to multiply his favours. "And at any time that you should wish to see the house in here, I hope you will remember that you have only to apply for admission and use my name—the people will be most happy to show you over."

"Thank you, sir, I——"

"Or stop, it will be better to give you my card. No, I have not one about me just now, but if you like to call for it some day at the Laurels I will be sure to leave it out. And you may take a friend or two with you if you like, you know."

John bowed awkwardly, and mumbled something that did duty as an acknowledgment. He knew that Mr. Waters's civilities were intended to be very encouraging, but somehow they had a diametrically opposite effect on him.

"Oh! you are quite welcome," said Austin with much urbanity. "And now good afternoon, Mr. Thwaites, the ladies are expecting me home to dinner."

"Oh indeed!" said John huskily. "Good afternoon, sir."

And then, the great man having once more extended a couple of fingers, the two parted and each went his way, Austin towards his elegant temporary home at the Laurels, John Thwaites towards his plain lodgings in the town. From some cause or other, the poor young man's spirits appeared to have been greatly damped by the interview, and he walked along with his eyes fixed on the ground, and with an expression on his face of even greater melancholy and abstraction than had been there when Austin first accosted him.

He was quite startled when, having gone a little way, he heard a cheerful voice say in front of him :

“Why, Mr. Thwaites, you are not going to pass me, surely?”

At the same moment a slender delicately gloved hand was held out (not only two fingers this time), and, raising his astonished eyes, he saw before him Olivia Egerton, looking so bright and radiant that he hardly recognised her until in an instant more he remembered that she had been always looking bright and radiant lately.

“Oh! Miss Egerton! I beg your pardon,”

he faltered, while he shyly took the proffered hand.

"So you ought to beg my pardon, I think. I could not have believed you guilty of so unkind a trick."

"I—I did not see you, indeed," apologised John humbly. He was in so downcast a mood that he made no allowance for the possibility of playfulness in anybody else.

"Oh! I knew that all the time of course," said Olivia, and then, struck by the utter spiritlessness of his manner, she looked at him rather scrutinizingly, and added: "You have been quite well all this long while, I hope?"

"Oh yes! quite well, thank you, Miss Egerton."

But still he spoke without an atom of briskness, and again Olivia looked at him scrutinizingly, and this time compassionately as well. She was quite touched by the despondency of his appearance, and, guessing its cause, inwardly resolved to help him so far as in her lay.

"You were going into Chorcombe, I think, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Yes, home to my lodgings."

"And I was going in the other direction, to Egerton Park. I wonder if you would mind turning with me a little way—it seems so long since we met."

"Oh! certainly—of course—with a great deal of pleasure," acquiesced John politely, but it did not look as if he were capable of taking pleasure in anything.

They walked on a short distance in silence, and then Olivia, observing her companion furtively, asked:

"Have you seen anything of the Waterses lately? I have not met you there for some time past."

"I—I suppose not," said John with a quavering voice. "No, I have not seen them for a long while—at least—that is—I met Mr. Waters a few minutes ago."

"Mr. Waters? Only Mr. Waters? And did you speak to him at all?"

"A little. He was rather in a hurry, going home to dinner."

The words were uttered in very low sad tones, and Olivia understood something of the character of the interview.



"Mr. Waters is a little changed since he came into his money—don't you find him so?" she asked.

"Yes, rather. But——"

"But we must not mind that, of course, and when we remember all the circumstances there are really great allowances to be made. All those years of poverty and dependence were enough to spoil anybody's character. You must excuse him, Mr. Thwaites."

"Oh! and so I do, I'm sure—so I should at least if I had any right to take offence. But then you know I never had any claim——"

"You have the claim of old friendship, and that ought to be a very strong one," interposed Olivia warmly. "But as I said, there are great allowances to be made for him and all of them. Not that there are any allowances required for Mrs. Waters, of course—she is perfection, and always has been—but that foolish little Emmy, her head is quite turned, and no wonder either, poor girl! Still I believe the child's heart is in the right place, and we must not mind about the rest."

John murmured something unintelligible in

reply, and Olivia saw that his face was scarlet.

"The best way is to let all her little airs pass and take no notice of them," she went on. "They don't mean anything, and it is a pity to give them an importance they don't deserve, a pity for her perhaps as well as—as for others. For it is my opinion—and I have seen a good deal of her, you must remember—it is my opinion that she would be just the girl to pretend to despise and look down on the very person whom she most liked and respected, and then perhaps to break her heart about him when she had succeeded in frightening him away. So I would not mind too much what she says or does—indeed, Mr. Thwaites, I would not, but just go on as if I thought she meant the very opposite. Do you understand?"

Apparently he had very well understood, for a gleam of joy had flashed over his face which made him for a moment look quite other than he had done just before. But immediately afterwards it died out again.

"You are very, very kind, Miss Egerton," he stammered, holding his head down as low as

possible, for he knew that the words were tantamount to an avowal of his love. "But—but I am afraid——"

"That's just it; you are afraid, a great deal too much afraid. You are every bit as good as she is, and you ought to let her see that you know it; you ought to pretend to know it even if you don't really, and I suppose you don't—the gentleman always regards himself as the inferior being in such cases, of course." Here Olivia stopped short in her Mentor-like harangue, dropping her long eye-lashes in sudden confusion, and blushing almost as violently as John Thwaites himself, and beyond doubt a great deal more becomingly. She had just bethought herself of a certain other gentleman, at that time thousands of miles away, to whom, he being in one respect very much in John Thwaites's case, her axiom might be held to apply, but how infinitely mistaken was he if he estimated himself so modestly! "Seriously," she continued, recovering herself as well as she could, "you give way to her a great deal too much, and she is a person whom it does not do to give way to. Assert yourself a little, and

don't seem as if you were always looking up to her for permission to exist. Will you remember that when you see her next?"

"I will try," he answered, still holding down his head, "when—when I do see her next, that is. But I dare say it will be a long time first; they never ask me now, and I don't like to go to a house where I am not asked."

He sighed deeply and relapsed into silence. Meanwhile Olivia, compassionating him more than ever, was reflecting how she might best serve him.

"Will you come to my house if you are asked?" she inquired presently.

"Oh! Miss Egerton!"

"Very well, then I shall hope to have a few friends to spend a quiet evening with me one day next week, and I shall expect the pleasure of your company. I don't name the evening now, because I must find out first which will suit the Waterses. But you will hold yourself disengaged, won't you?"

He was quite overwhelmed by so much kindness, to say nothing of a certain strange commotion about his heart at the idea of once more

spending an evening in Emmy's company.

"I'm sure, Miss Egerton, how I am ever to thank you——"

"Then that is quite settled—I will let you know the evening as soon as it is fixed. And now I will not take you a step further out of your way—no, I insist upon it. Good-bye, I am very much obliged for your escort so far."

She left him, and made her way quickly up the road towards where the scant yellow foliage of the Egerton Park trees quivered wanly in the pale evening light of the October sun. But though she was gone, the consolatory influence of her words remained, and John Thwaites, bending his solitary steps towards the village over fallen autumn leaves that continually rustled as he went, felt in his heart a whisper of hope which seemed like a legacy from the spring.

## CHAPTER XII.

*A Charade.*

OLIVIA did not forget her promise to John Thwaites—she was too happy herself not to do her best towards making all others happy likewise. For, in spite of separation from her betrothed, Olivia continued to be in a state of intense beatitude. The knowledge that there was one person in the world infinitely dear to her, and to whom she was infinitely dear in turn, was in itself so supreme a delight that she could have lived on it more or less contentedly even with no exchange of correspondence and with no definite time fixed for a re-union. As it was, however, her lover's letters kept her constantly supplied with news of him, and the last had held out hopes of an almost immediate return to England, in consequence of the unex-

pected facility with which his affairs had got themselves arranged. So that Olivia was at this time in a seventh heaven of blissful anticipation, but, as has been said, her own happiness only made her all the more anxious to secure if possible that of poor John Thwaites. Accordingly the next time she saw the Waterses (and she made it her business to see them very soon) they received and accepted a pressing invitation to come and spend a quiet evening at Egerton House, when perhaps one or two other friends might be asked to meet them.

The appointed evening came, duly bringing with it Mr. and Mrs. Waters and Emmy, and the one or two other friends likewise, making a party of some fourteen or fifteen in all. The composition of the company seemed simple enough, but it had really been the subject of a good deal of study, arising from Olivia's wish to make the party sufficiently numerous to admit of *tête-à-tête* love-making, and at the same time to invite no one who could by possibility be a rival to the intended hero of the evening.

She had at least succeeded in fulfilling the latter of these conditions, though she was a little

apprehensive about her success with regard to the former. Besides herself and Mrs. Waddilove, the Waters family and John Thwaites, there were, first, Mr. Mrs. and Miss Elkins, secondly, Captain Tomlinson and Miss Tomlinson—an elderly brother and sister who lived in a cottage near Chorcombe on the Captain's half-pay, and both much too elderly to be of the smallest danger among young people—and lastly, Mrs. Jolliffe, the widow of the physician who had been Dr. Plummer's predecessor, with two lively red-cheeked daughters, and a juvenile son of gawky demeanour and long lanky figure for which his clothes were visibly too short. The elements of the party were perhaps rather too much like those of a village tea-drinking to be quite consistent with the dignity of Egerton House, as Olivia could not help feeling, but then what was she to do? A dinner-party would have been much too formal an affair for the promotion of the object she had in view, while an evening party or ball would have necessitated the presence of a host of young men who might have edged John Thwaites out of a hearing altogether. And as John Thwaites



was the person for whose sake the whole thing had been got up, everything was made subservient to his interests on the occasion.

The Waterses were rather late in making their appearance (Austin had been hard at work with Mr. Tovey up to the last minute), so that when they were shown into the stately drawing-room at Egerton House all the rest of the company were already assembled. The new-comers, who were still too inexperienced in social phraseology to know that one or two means at least ten or twelve, were all three rather surprised at finding so many more than they had expected; but especially surprised was Emmy when, having shaken hands with Olivia, she saw rising to greet her a gentleman, who turned out to be John Thwaites. She was indeed violently surprised—so much so that in order to conceal the flutter of her nerves, she was obliged to return his salutation with extra stiffness and frigidity.

“Ah! Mr. Thwaites, how do you do? Oh! Miss Elkins, I am *so* glad to see you.”

And then, with much effusiveness of manner, she let herself drop into a vacant chair by Miss Elkins's side, while John wandered disconsol-

ately back to the place he had already found for himself, quite at the other end of the room. The beginning was certainly not auspicious.

Meantime Emmy, carrying on a specially friendly talk with Miss Elkins, and demurely sipping her tea in the intervals, did not by any means recover herself instantaneously. At the risk of occasional incoherencies in her conversation with Miss Elkins, she could not keep herself from thinking of John Thwaites, and even casting a glance now and then in his direction. Fancy meeting him again after such an age! above all, fancy meeting him as a guest at Egerton House—Egerton House, where all the best people of the county were invited! Miss Egerton must really see a great deal in him. Well, this evening, at least, there was no denying that he was looking to more than usual advantage. What a long way off he was sitting—one would almost think he was offended—or perhaps it was just because he was so shy. And yet he could not be so very shy either—only look at him starting up to put down Maria Jolliffe's cup. What a horribly affected girl that was, and how hideously she did her hair! it was im-

possible any one could admire her. And yet very likely John Thwaites would be sticking in that part of the room all the evening, just because there was no unoccupied chair over here. It would be strange if they were in the room together all evening and never so much as spoke to each other, but it was almost more likely than not. She might have to rise once or twice to go to the piano, perhaps, but of course it was not for her to rush about the room after John Thwaites (the very idea indeed!), so if he did not come to her—What nasty stupid things those tea-parties were!

And in this opinion Emmy continued all the time that tea was going on, and perhaps John Thwaites, ever and anon sending a hopeless glance from the other extremity of the room, was pretty much of the same way of thinking. At length the last cup was laid down, and the hostess got up and held a short parley with Mrs. Waddilove, looking round the room meanwhile as though passing her guests under review. Emmy thought that there was about to be a demand for some music, but instead of this, the announcement was made that there

was going to be a charade, and that all the young people were wanted as actors.

The two Miss Jolliffes—sprightly girls up in the theory and practice of every kind of amusement from cards to croquet—at once protested that nothing could be more delightful, and volunteered their services and those of their brother enthusiastically. Emmy had never so much as seen a charade played in her life, and felt rather nervous at the idea of taking a part in the performance, but she was obliged to yield to the representations of Olivia, who declared that she could not possibly be spared. In the same way Olivia managed to overcome the reluctance of John Thwaites, who was as inexperienced as Emmy, and a great deal more diffident of his own qualifications. But Miss Egerton told him that he was absolutely required, and, remembering what she had said on a former occasion as to the necessity of self-assertion, he screwed up his courage sufficiently to consent. There remained to be persuaded only Miss Elkins, and that young lady, being of a very stiff and wooden temperament, at first seemed to think the affair altogether beneath

her dignity. But even she was eventually coaxed into compliance by the Miss Jolliffes, who, in virtue of an ancient boarding-school companionship, bore themselves on all occasions as her sworn friends and allies, and now took her specially under their protection.

The actors being thus got together, they were marshalled into the old oak library by Olivia in the capacity of manager, and forthwith an animated discussion began as to the choice of a word and the mode of treatment. Emmy, as being utterly unversed in the subject, stood a little apart, in some trepidation as to what might be expected from her, when suddenly her eye caught that of a person standing apart likewise (that is, apart from the main body of the company, for he was almost close to herself), and she fell into greater trepidation than ever, and yet somehow felt slightly reassured too.

"I am quite nervous about it," she informed this person, involuntarily drawing a step nearer him as she spoke. "I never acted in a charade before, did you?"

"Never," was the answer, made very tremu-

lously, but the tremulousness was by no means altogether due to apprehension on the score of the charade. "I am afraid I am sure to make some dreadful mistake."

"And I am quite positive I shall. Dear me, Mr. Thwaites, what shall we do?"

"I suppose we must just do as we are bid," said John, smiling shyly (ah! how delicious was the use she had empowered him to make of that plural pronoun!). "We shall get through it somehow, no doubt."

"Oh! but I hope they will not give us anything very difficult. For really and truly I know nothing about charades whatever."

But already Emmy thought charades very pleasant things.

In the meantime the word and its treatment had both been decided upon, and all the resources of the household were laid under contribution for the needful stage properties and costumes. Fortunately former possessors of Egerton House had dabbled more or less in private theatricals, so that there was a very tolerable wardrobe at command, with the aid of which Olivia—who in the first scene was to

enact the proprietress of a ham, beef, and sausage establishment, with Master Augustus Jolliffe under her for shop-boy—proceeded to array herself as much in accordance with her part as possible, in a coal-scuttle bonnet and red tartan shawl. Then, amid a great deal of merriment, the remaining members of the company, who were to represent a succession of chance customers, got themselves up as characteristically as might be under the circumstances. Emmy laughed prodigiously, and declared to John Thwaites that she didn't know when she had been so amused.

The first scene went off very successfully. On the removal of a screen which divided the drawing-room into auditorium and proscenium, Olivia was discovered standing at her counter with a real ham and a real joint of beef before her, and in her hands a real knife and fork of monster dimensions, with which she gesticulated very effectively while administering a savage lecture to her shop-boy for laziness and general inefficiency. The lecture over, the customers began to appear—first a woman with a pair of pattens in one hand and a jug and door-key in

the other (the eldest Miss Jolliffe), who came for a bit of something for her husband's dinner, and complained bitterly of the trodden-down state of the female sect ; next a man with a coal-heaver's hat on his head and a short pipe in his mouth, who wanted a pound of sausages if you please. This was John Thwaites, and, it being his first appearance on any stage, he made the demand in mild, timid tones very inappropriate to the character. He felt the inconsistency himself, and, gathering courage as he went on, ventured to interrupt Olivia as she was putting up in paper the little improvised bundles of brown rag which represented the sausages, by expressing a hope that they were genuine—a sally which was received with immense applause, and was considered quite the hit of the evening. When the coal-heaver had retired amid the plaudits of the company, there entered a maid-of-all-work with a big basket on her arm (the youngest Miss Jolliffe), who had a great deal to say of the tyranny of lodgers, and wanted a pork chop. After her came a young lady elegantly attired in silks and laces (this was Miss Elkins, much too dignified a per-



sonage to submit to a vulgar disguise), and asked for two ounces of tripe—a demand which created some mirth among the audience, greatly to the surprise of the performer, who had simply said what she had been told to say, without any perception of incongruity. And finally there came a smart little maid-servant, with the neatest and tiniest of caps perched on the top of her head (Emmy), and faltered out a request for two shillings'-worth of ham cut thin for sandwiches, whereat Olivia asked if the missus was going to have a party, and received an answer in the affirmative. Then the screen was put up again, and the first scene declared at an end.

“How absurd it is, to be sure!” said Emmy, when she had got back to the library; and the person she addressed was naturally John Thwaites, all the others being busy discussing the next syllable. “Though it certainly is very amusing. Oh! Mr. Thwaites, it was so funny to see you in that hat, you can’t think. Did you feel at all nervous? But you really got through your part capitally, and what a good thing that was you said, and how it made them

all laugh! I can't imagine how you came to think of it; I felt as if I couldn't have said anything out of my own head."

"I'm sure you did your part most beautifully, Miss Emmy," said John, blushing crimson at such compliments from such a quarter.

"Did I?" said Emmy, giving a shake of her little head, which nearly shook off the neat cap. "Oh dear me! here I am with this thing on still—isn't it ridiculous? I suppose I am the oddest-looking figure, am I not?"

He surveyed her admiringly—so admiringly that she began to blush in her turn—and seemed about to make a very gallant answer, when the pair were called upon to take their instructions for the next scene, the programme of which had now been decided.

"I am to be a frugally minded lady, who, wishing to go to the sea-side, resolves to let her house furnished during her absence," said Olivia, "and now we have got to think how my household is to be constructed. Let me see, the Miss Jolliffes have so much humour, and do so excel in soubrette characters, that I must positively secure them for cook and housemaid; these are

always the most difficult parts, and need the best acting. Then there must be a page, of course, with buttons all the way down—oh! you will do that, Mr. Augustus, won't you? And you will be a young lady visitor, perhaps, Miss Elkins, and then there will be no trouble about altering your dress. And now let me see," she went on meditatively, "we must have a lady and gentleman to come after the house—oh! of course Mr. Thwaites and Miss Waters will do that," she added, with a semi-triumphant air, as though she had only just thought of them. "You are to be Mr. Snoggins, if you please, Mr. Thwaites—Mr. Samuel Snoggins—and you are to be Mrs. Snoggins, Emmy; mind you don't forget the name."

"Oh! but I am sure I shall," said Emmy, pouting, yet apparently not altogether displeased. "Snoggins!"—(she did not like to say Mrs. Snoggins considering who Mr. Snoggins was to be)—"what a ridiculous name, to be sure—and then such a silly part—Oh! upon my word I think somebody else had better do it."

"But you see, dear, all the rest have got

their parts already. Come, you really must oblige us."

"Oh yes! Miss Emmy, you really must," put in John Thwaites in a pleading whisper.

"Oh! well, I suppose I must," said Emmy, still pouting, but blushing very much at the same time. "Only it is so very, very absurd, you know."

Things being thus arranged, the necessary preparations were made, and the second scene began. Olivia, in the character of the frugal-minded lady, was discovered in the midst of her household, announcing her determination to let her house during her stay at the sea-side, and instructing her servants how to answer any intending tenant who might privately question them as to damp or black beetles, the existence of which they were strenuously to deny. While this was going on in the room, Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were waiting outside, ready to enter on a signal from one of the actors; and as the Miss Jolliffes threw themselves into the spirit of their parts with great zest, and were very eloquent on the subject of board wages, the signal was a long time in coming.

"I am getting so nervous again," whispered Emmy, as they thus waited. "I am so much afraid of making some mistake."

"Oh no! you won't, Miss Emmy. You remember the name, I hope?"

"Snoggins?" said Emmy, blushing.

"Yes, and my name is Samuel. By the way, you must be sure to call me Sam once or twice."

He was almost afraid that his new-found courage had carried him too far, but instead of looking disdainful as he had feared, she only blushed a little more, and toyed with her bracelet while she murmured that she didn't think it would be necessary to call him anything. That thrice-blessed charade—how it seemed to have broken down the wall between them!

"I wonder how we ought to go in," he said presently, getting bolder and bolder with his impunity.

"How we ought to go in," said Emmy. "What do you mean?"

"I mean ought we to go in arm in arm? Don't you think——"

But Emmy hastily declared that there could

not be the least occasion for such a thing. Still, however, she was not angry, for a moment afterwards she begged him to be kind enough to tell her if her bonnet was quite straight.

Just as he was looking to see, the appointed signal was made, and they had to enter in a great hurry, and in such confusion that the double knock that was to have announced them was quite forgotten.

The scene was got through somehow—rather lamely, it is to be feared, so far as Mr. and Mrs. Snoggins were concerned, but each was too much fluttered to take note of the shortcomings of the other—and the party returned to the library.

Here Olivia announced that the last act of the charade was to consist of a dumb-show representation of the scene in which Hamlet, accompanied by Horatio and Marcellus, first sees his father's ghost.

"As the thing is to be in dumb-show," she pursued, "it does not matter much how we distribute the parts. Mr. Thwaites will be Hamlet, of course, but as our only other gentleman will

be wanted for ghost, we must just be contented with ladies for Horatio and Marcellus ; with long cloaks and plumed hats they will do very well. Emmy dear, just try on that cloak, and see if it covers your dress sufficiently—oh yes ! that will do nicely. And perhaps you will be kind enough to take the other part, Miss Jolliffe—only first you must please come and help to make up your brother as ghost. The ghost is to be the grand feature of the scene, and we must lavish all our resources on him.”

And then Olivia and the Miss Jolliffes, and ostensibly Miss Elkins (only she was not of much use), all put their heads together as to the manner in which the unfortunate Augustus was to be be plastered and befloured into the likeness of a theatrical ghost, the victim submitting himself with the uncomplaining meekness and deference to his sisters’ commands which he had shown all through the evening’s proceedings. Meantime Emmy and John Thwaites, already dressed for their parts in long cloaks and melo dramatic hats with enormous plumes, stood a little apart from the rest, waiting for their services to be required, and both feeling in a state of extreme flurry, as

was perhaps only natural considering the novelty of their position.

"It is all dreadful nonsense, certainly," remarked Emmy in low tones as she stood casting about for something to say, "and yet somehow it is great fun too. I really have enjoyed it rather, haven't you?"

"Enjoyed it, Miss Emmy! I don't know when I have enjoyed anything half so much. Not for a great, great many months," he added, with a sigh, for he was getting very courageous, and thought he saw a way of improving the occasion.

"Really," said Emmy, in tones still lower, while she gave a little adjusting shake to the folds of her cloak. "I am afraid then you must have been spending rather a dull time of it."

"I have indeed," he made answer dolefully, "and a great deal worse than dull. I have been very, very miserable."

"Dear me! I am sorry to hear that," said Emmy, in a voice which would have sounded wonderfully unconcerned if it had not trembled so. "And pray what has it been owing to?"



“Can you not guess, Miss Emmy?”

But Emmy, looking very hard at the floor, and speaking almost in a whisper, declared that she had not the slightest idea.

“Don’t you know that I have only seen you three times to speak to since you came home from Nidbourne? And don’t you think that that is enough to make me miserable?”

Emmy murmured something quite inaudible.

“Yes, only three times to speak to,” he went on, “and then oh! how cold and distant you were—it made me more miserable than if I had not seen you at all. And four times to bow to you out of doors—and once, last Thursday week, I saw you in a shop as I was passing by on the other side of the street, but you were standing with your back to me, and never looked round.”

“If I never looked round, how do you know it was me at all?” said Emmy with a quavering little laugh.

“How did I know? I can’t tell, but it was you, I will swear to that. And I can tell you this, Miss Emmy, if I saw the folds of your dress, yes, or so much as the end of one of your

ribbons half a mile off, I should know it was yours among a thousand."

"Dear me!" said Emmy faintly, pulling her broad-brimmed hat a trifle further on her brows. "And yet I am sure my ribbons are just like other people's."

"Not to me!" he asseverated eagerly.

"Oh! what nonsense, Mr. Thwaites, I am sure they are. They almost all come out of the draper's shop at Chorcombe, so there really can be no difference, you see," argued Emmy, affecting to misunderstand him.

"Oh! Miss Emmy, you know what I mean. Anything of yours is different from other people's in my eyes. Anything you have worn or looked at even is made precious to me from that moment forth."

He was getting quite poetical in the ardour of his feelings.

"How can you say such things?" murmured Emmy. "Just as if you could think a strip of coloured silk precious!"

"Don't I though?" he responded warmly. "If you had worn it, I would treasure up a strip of coloured silk all my life long—if I had the chance."

There was a pause, and then, in a voice that trembled more than ever, Emmy said :

“Of course I know what to think of that—all gentlemen say such things to ladies. But they would throw away the ribbons directly the ladies were out of sight.”

“I would keep yours next my heart for ever and ever,” he protested.

She was silent again for a while, and then suddenly (somewhat to his discomfiture, for he thought he might have gone too far) changed the subject by once more remarking what very foolish things charades were.

“It does seem so silly dressing up like this, does it not? You look so funny, Mr. Thwaites, and so do I, I am sure.”

“Oh no! indeed, on the contrary——”

“Oh! but I know I do—with a great immense cloak like this on, only fancy! And the stupid thing doesn’t fasten all the way down—it will be sure to fly open and show my dress.”

“It won’t signify much if it does,” said John consolingly. “The dress being black, nobody will notice it.”

“Oh! if it was only the dress, of course not,

but it is trimmed with mauve all down the front—only look at that great staring bow at the bottom; it is certain to show.” She considered the offending bow for a moment in apparent ruefulness, and added: “I declare I will cut the thing off—it will spoil all the illusion.”

“Couldn’t you pin the cloak over it?” said John; “it seems almost a pity——”

“Oh! the pin would be sure to come out. Have you a penknife about you, Mr. Thwaites? —look, there is only a thread or two to cut through; those dress-makers fasten things on so badly.”

As she spoke she held the threads stretched out so that he might cut them. He did so, and the bow, a knot of violet ribbons, fell to the ground. He instantly picked it up and presented it to her, but instead of putting it into her pocket as he had expected, she tossed it carelessly on to a chair. At that instant—whether or not in consequence of any peculiarity in her manner he did not stay to consider—his mind was illumined as by a sudden inspiration.

“May I keep it? Oh! Emmy, do you mean

me to keep it?" he exclaimed, betrayed by the tumult of his feelings into forgetfulness of all ordinary forms of address.

She did not answer, but on looking into her face, now flushed from brow to chin, he saw a certain quivering about the corners of her mouth which told him that he had not been mistaken.

He took up the fluttering ribbons and pressed them to his lips again and again, but though these demonstrations dyed her cheeks if possible deeper still, she did not attempt any expostulation, perhaps because she had no energy for expostulation left. Her senses were in a kind of maze which made everything about her seem unreal and dreamlike. Only she was very glad to know that everything was quite real.

Emmy never very well knew how the remainder of that evening was spent. She had a dim remembrance next day of walking through her part in the Hamlet scene, with John Thwaites close to her all the while, and then of re-appearing in the drawing-room in her own character, and receiving sundry rather embarrassing compliments on her impersonation of Mrs. Snoggins.

She was aware also that there had been some music, and that John Thwaites had never taken his eyes off her all the time she was playing, also that he had escorted her in to supper, and that they both had been very silent, except once when he found an opportunity of whispering something about the ribbons, and how he would never, never part with them. And then she had a confused, though very deeply graven, recollection of a certain pressure of the hand she had received just as she was stepping into the carriage after her mother—a pressure which still seemed to electrify her whole frame as she thought of it. And finally she knew that the evening had altogether been the very pleasantest she had ever spent.

Decidedly Olivia had understood what she was about when she proposed to get up a charade.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*A New Turn.*

FOR the next two or three days Emmy moved about in a sort of dream. She bore her part as usual in the little details of household daily life, but her thoughts were in nothing that she did, and, instead of occupying themselves with the business of the present, were confusedly wandering amid recollections of the past, or more confusedly yet amid vaguely imagined potentialities of the future. So absorbing were the reveries to which she thus gave herself up, that she was scarcely aware of the little adjuncts of new-found grandeur in which she had hitherto taken such delight, while even such matters as the progress of Chorcombe Lodge and the prospects of the future town at Beacon Bay had all at once become of quite minor importance in her eyes.

From this unwonted state of apathy she was roused one morning very abruptly. Her father, neglecting his breakfast, as he often did neglect it in those days, was poring over his newspaper—his newspaper was more interesting than ever to him now that the usual November notifications of projected railways were beginning to appear—when he suddenly uttered a stifled cry, and the paper shook violently in his hand.

“Austin!” exclaimed Mrs. Waters anxiously. “What is the matter?”

He looked up from the paper, and his wife and daughter, observing him intently, saw that his face had become deadly pale.

“The Beacon Bay line——” he began in thick hurried accents, and then stopped, unable to say more, while the blood rushed back to his face till his brow and his very temples were suffused with purple.

“It is not to be then?” said Mrs. Waters soothingly. “Oh! Austin dear, never——”

“But it is to be,” he broke in vehemently. “It is advertised to-day, and the Bill is to be brought before Parliament next session. The



line will be open for traffic within two years, and I shall get back all my money and ten times more. Didn't I always tell you so, didn't I? Look, here it is in black and white, if you don't believe me."

He pushed the paper towards his wife, who indeed was scarcely yet able to realise the fact that it was joy rather than disappointment which had been the cause of so much agitation. But a glance sufficed to show her that the fact was really so. The intention of the Directors to come before Parliament with a Bill for a new branch railway from Chorcombe to Beacon Bay was officially notified to the public in a long advertisement setting out at full length the plan of the proposed line, the expected time of opening, and every other detail of the project. Thus had Austin's most sanguine calculations been so far abundantly verified.

"Didn't I tell you?" he repeated triumphantly, "didn't I tell you? You see I was not such a fool as perhaps you thought me, and Tovey and Frisby were not such fools either. Oh! I always knew it would come right, I never doubted it for a moment—never really doubted

it, that is. That old ass of a Podmore! what he has made me go through! And now it has come right, you see, and I am the richest man in the county—yes, and to be one of the richest in the whole kingdom some day, only wait a little. And if I am the richest man in the county, mind, my wife is the richest lady, and my daughter the richest heiress, and they are to hold their heads up as if they thought so. Eh, Agnes! eh, Emmy! what do you say?”

“Dear papa, of course it is delightful,” said Emmy, getting up to kiss him.

But though Emmy was unquestionably very much pleased, she was not quite so exultant as she probably would have been if the good news had come a few days earlier. For somehow since that pleasant evening at Olivia's she had got into the habit of mixing up John Thwaites very much in her estimate of things and events, and when, according to this unconscious habit, she thought of John Thwaites with reference to this new accession of fortune, she could not help feeling that the tidings would put him to more or less pain. She was a little sorry, for John Thwaites did not deserve to be put to pain; he was so

very good, and he had gone through so much already. But it was not her fault this time, at all events, and besides, there was no real reason for him to vex himself unless he chose. So Emmy did her best to shake off reflection, and tried to rejoice in her good fortune without reservation.

The day which had thus begun with such excitement was naturally one of a good deal of bustle and turmoil as it went on. Mr. Tovey, who of course had seen the advertisement also, came over in great haste to congratulate his patron, and discuss the possible further development of their plans. Mr. Frisby took the liberty of looking in likewise, to offer his felicitations on the occasion; and after a very jovial lunch, at which a good many glasses of wine were drunk, and a good many new ideas started and discussed, all three gentlemen set off together to inspect the progress of the works which events had suddenly invested with so much additional importance.

Even after their departure the household did not settle down into its normal condition. As was perhaps only natural, Emmy was inclined

to be specially restless and excited; and to make her more restless and excited still, she and her mother had hardly been left alone when a visitor was announced—Mr. Randal Egerton. Now Mr. Randal Egerton never having honoured them with a call since that which he had paid them shortly after their return from Nidbourne, this was in itself a very flurrying circumstance.

Mrs. Waters rose to greet the new-comer with what struck Emmy as a shade less than the cordiality with which her mother was wont to receive strangers in general, but the young man was as charmingly frank and friendly as ever.

“How do you do, Mrs. Waters? I am delighted to see you looking so well. Miss Waters, how do you do?” and, turning towards Emmy, he looked at her the compliment which he had spoken to her mother.

Both ladies having murmured something in reply, he gracefully let himself drop into a chair which Mrs. Waters had pointed to, and proceeded to remark what an immense time it was since he had had the pleasure of seeing them.

"I have been constantly wondering whether I might do myself the honour of calling, yet never could feel sure how far it might not be regarded as a liberty" (on the occasion of his last visit he had expressly asked and received permission to call again, but he seemed to have forgotten this circumstance). "And then I was always hoping that I might have the pleasure of meeting you in society; but in that, I don't know why, I have been invariably disappointed."

"We go very little into company," said Mrs. Waters in explanation.

"So I believe, but if you will pardon me for saying so, that is more and more of an enigma. I cannot think that either of you would willingly neglect a plain duty, and there are some people who have not the right to make hermits of themselves even if they have the inclination."

He looked at both ladies as he said this, but Emmy thought that his glance rested on her a little longer than on her mother, and could not help feeling as self-conscious as though a special compliment had been paid her. What a fin-

ished gentleman and man of the world this Mr. Egerton was !

“Papa has been so much engaged lately,” she faltered, “that really——”

“I can understand that where the demands of society would be so numerous, it might be too great a sacrifice to satisfy them all, but surely you ought to make some exceptions. The *fête* at the Castle the other day, for instance, when Lord Trevorton came of age—I made sure that I should have the pleasure of meeting you there.”

Again Emmy felt very much complimented. It was pleasant to have it taken for granted that they were on the Castle visiting-list, and yet it was a little embarrassing as well. Was it necessary to confess that they had not received an invitation ? But her mother solved the uncertainty at once by proclaiming the fact in so many words.

Randal did not seem surprised as Emmy had expected that he would ; and certainly the expression of his surprise, though gratifying in one respect, would have been slightly humiliating in another.

"It is natural that you should not be invited when it is known how studiously you keep yourselves aloof from all society," he answered with a shrug of the shoulders. "People don't like to lay themselves open to a refusal, especially people in that station. But it is none the less your own fault that you were not present, and I really think those who were present have some cause to complain."

He spoke the last words with quite an ill-used air, and Emmy felt hugely gratified. Was it possible the Castle people had really been afraid of a refusal? And yet very likely it was so. She thought of John Thwaites, and wondered what he would say if he were to hear of her mixing in such magnificent company.

"I suppose it was a very gay affair," she remarked timidly, by way of saying something.

"It was altogether a very pleasant day. Really it is a thousand pities you were not there; the gathering of county families would then have been almost complete. Did you see the paragraph about it in the papers this morning?"

"I did not notice it," said Emmy.

"I see they speak of Lady Victoria Fenton as being the observed of all observers. I can't say I was extraordinarily impressed with her myself, but she was the beauty of the evening decidedly—for want of a better."

Here his eye, accidentally as it were, caught for an instant that of Emmy, who felt herself getting very red.

"She is very handsome, no doubt," he went on, withdrawing his eyes again to fix them on the handle of his riding-whip. "I remember her coming-out ball last winter; she made quite a sensation. What charming things those coming-out balls are!"

Emmy's heart swelled as she thought how charming they must indeed be, and how happy must be the heroine of such an occasion. Ah! if only her father and mother would give a ball, perhaps she might make almost as great a sensation as Lady Victoria had done. And then only fancy what John Thwaites would think!

"But I suppose it is vain to ask your opinion of balls or parties of any kind, Miss Waters. You disapprove of them altogether, I am afraid."

"Oh no, indeed!" she protested; "on the con-



trary, I am sure I should quite delight in them. And indeed papa is always talking of letting me have a ball or something some day, only he has had so much to worry him lately——But I think he surely won't put off much longer now that it is all settled about the railway."

"All settled about the railway?" echoed Randal with a puzzled air.

"Did you not know?" said Emmy, quite astonished. "There is an advertisement in the papers this morning which shows it is all right; the railway is to be begun next year. Papa is so pleased; he is over at Beacon Bay now."

"Indeed! In the papers this morning, you say? Ah! no wonder I didn't know—I have not opened a paper for a week."

Emmy was a little surprised to hear this, remembering what he had said as to the paragraph about the *fête*, but presently she understood that he must have been speaking figuratively, and merely meant that he had not looked at the advertisements that morning.

"Papers are such bores generally, are they not? But I am extremely glad to hear that for once they have proved so interesting. Mrs.

Waters, I have to offer you my warmest congratulations. I am afraid you must have thought me very odd for not doing so sooner, but of course having no idea——”

“Oh! of course,” said Mrs. Waters. “But I did not think anything about it, I assure you.”

“It is very good of you to say so. I would not knowingly have been so neglectful for the world. Well, at least now you must allow me to say how heartily I rejoice at the news. Will you please present my compliments to Mr. Waters, and tell him that nobody can congratulate him more sincerely than I do.”

Mrs. Waters thanked him, and said she would do as he wished. Emmy muttered something about Mr. Egerton being very kind, and looked at her mother rather reproachfully. But, in spite of Emmy’s reproachful look, Mrs. Waters did not say more.

“I hope we shall all have reason to congratulate ourselves,” Randal pursued. “As you say, Miss Waters, perhaps now that a matter is settled which must have occupied so much of your father’s thoughts, his neighbours may have a chance of seeing him and all of you a

little more frequently among them—the boon conferred on them by the new railway will then be doubled.”

He accompanied this speech with a gallant bow, which made Emmy feel more than ever self-conscious.

“Oh yes! I am sure papa will be quite different now,” she replied, with a shake of her curls. “Indeed I almost think I will try and coax him to let us get up a ball at once—it would be so delightful.”

“And I can only say, Miss Waters, that I hope your coaxing may be effectual—at least I should hope so if I thought I might venture to aspire to the privilege of an invitation,” he added, with a deferential look towards the lady of the house.

Emmy’s pulses gave a leap of exultation. And so here already was one guest for the ball, if only her father would let her have it, and a guest of how much personal and social distinction! What *would* John Thwaites think when he saw? If only her father would let her have a ball at all just now!

Randal kept his dark eyes fixed on her for a

moment, and then, perhaps judging that the right amount of effect had been produced, rose to take leave. Before finally doing so, however, he inquired, just as he was shaking hands with Mrs. Waters :

“By the way, have you heard anything of when this Mr. Graham is to come back?”

The name was one which, since the conversation that had followed on Randal's last visit, made both mother and daughter feel strangely embarrassed when either heard it mentioned in the presence of the other. For an instant there was a pause which called up on the young man's face a slight but perceptible look of surprise, whereupon Mrs. Waters, making a great effort at self-composure, answered :

“I believe very soon now, at least so I hear from Miss Egerton. I understand he is to return earlier than was expected.”

“So it seems ; Olivia is quite in good spirits about it. Well, since what you told me last time I was here, I am in good spirits too—it was indeed a very, very great relief to my mind. Good-bye—my best regards and congratulations to Mr. Waters. Miss Waters, I have the plea-

sure of wishing you good day. I hope you will be successful in your pleading, but indeed I cannot imagine how you could be anything else."

And then, with a low bow and another expressive look, the brilliant stranger had departed, and the drawing-room at the Laurels faded into its normal state of dreary grandeur.

If Emmy had been unsettled before, she was more unsettled than ever now. The idea of a ball had got fairly into her head, and for that day she could think of nothing else. How charming it would be, and what a lovely dress she would have, and what a competition there would be for the honour of dancing with her! Mr. Egerton would ask her first, of course—only fancy dancing with Mr. Egerton! And John Thwaites would be looking on—how surprised he would be to see her so splendidly dressed, and how he would follow her with his eyes as she moved through the mazes of the dance with her partner! Somebody would tell him no doubt that her partner was Mr. Egerton of Clare Court—how astonished he would be!—but she would take it all entirely as an every-

day affair, and would go on laughing and talking and fanning herself quite unconcernedly. And later in the evening (for naturally she would have to dance with all the principal gentlemen first) John Thwaites himself would ask for the honour of her hand, and she would consent of course—she could not do less. And then what nonsense he would talk, and what things he would whisper about the ribbon, and how he would press her hand when it touched his in the course of the dance, and how she would find him looking at her when she raised her eyes, and how——Ah! that dear delightful ball—it would be nicer even than charades.

Her father had no sooner returned that evening than she began her attack.

“Papa, I have a great favour to ask of you.”

“Well, child, out with it,” said Austin jovially, and though he was looking rather flushed and heated, Emmy saw that he was in an unwontedly accessible humour.

“Papa dear,” she went on more boldly, “now that it has all come right about the railway, will you let us have a party? You know you have promised us something of the sort for an

age, so I really think you ought to do it now. And you have never taken us up to London, as you said you would, and of course you can't now till next season; and everybody is wondering at our making such hermits of ourselves—Mr. Randal Egerton was here to-day, and upon my word to hear him speak, one would think we had given great offence—and I am so fond of dancing, and——”

“And—and——what's the use of so many ands, child? A party—yes, as large a party as ever you like to ask, and dancing till six o'clock in the morning if you can keep awake. And everybody shall fill a bumper to the prosperity of the Beacon Bay railway, what do you think of that? A party—why, it's a first-rate idea. Send out the invitations the first thing to-morrow, d'ye hear? And come and kiss me in the meantime.”

Emmy responded enthusiastically to the demand.

“Oh! papa, it is so very, very kind of you. If you only knew how I have been longing for it! A ball in one's own house, how delicious!”

"But my dear," put in Mrs. Waters in some consternation, "I am afraid your ball will be a very small one. We know comparatively so few——"

"And that's just why we ought to make a beginning," retorted Emmy. "Why, you may understand by what Mr. Egerton said how we have been offending people. If we ever want to make friends, we must let them see we can give entertainments like our neighbours, and a small party is better than none at all, at any rate. Besides, it won't be so very small either—there will be the Elkinsees, and the Jolliffes, and the Tomlinsons, and the Walkers, and the Wilsons, and the Smiths—oh! and loads and loads more! And then there will be Miss Egerton—and by the way, we must not forget Mr. Egerton while we are about it, he as good as said he expected to be asked, you know."

"Mr. Egerton!" said her mother, looking rather troubled. "But Mr. Egerton belongs to such a very different set from ours——"

"Oh! mamma," said Emmy reproachfully. "Why, if he is better than all our other friends, that is just the reason for inviting him. And when he as good as said——"



"Invite him, of course," interposed her father peremptorily. "I consider him a very suitable acquaintance to cultivate," and here he waved his hand loftily.

"And then," resumed Emmy when this point had been settled, "there will be the Simpsons, and the Kings, and the Attwoods——"

"And John Thwaites," murmured Mrs. Waters as Emmy paused to consider.

"John Thwaites!" echoed Emmy carelessly, yet with a slight inflection of surprise, as though the idea were quite new to her. "Oh! well—yes, I suppose so—one couldn't very well leave him out when one is asking everybody."

And thus this point was settled also, and the ball took rank among the things that were to be.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*Emmy's First Ball.*

ABOUT a month after this, in the beginning of December, an evening came which had been looked forward to and prepared for at the Laurels as never evening had been looked forward to and prepared for there before. It was the evening appointed for the ball.

The occasion was as grand as even Emmy could have desired. In the interval, short as it was, which had elapsed since the official decision with regard to the Beacon Bay railway had been made known, there had been an appreciable widening of the somewhat narrow circle of acquaintances to which the family had hitherto been restricted, and some important additions had in consequence been made to the originally rather scanty list of invitations. For instance,

the heads of one or two considerable county families in the district had made a polite morning call on the new occupants of the Laurels, alleging absence from home as an excuse for not having done so sooner, while one or two other desirable acquaintanceships which had languished after a single exchange of calls had been suddenly galvanised into new life by a note or visit of congratulation. Then Austin had all at once found some of the owners and tenants of property adjoining his newly acquired estate at Beacon Bay laudably desirous of cultivating neighbourly intimacy, and in that and other quarters had managed to pick up sundry very eligible guests not at first counted on.

Thus the reception-rooms at the Laurels—draped and garlanded and illuminated till they looked quite resplendent with light and colour—were very satisfactorily filled, satisfactorily as regarded quality no less than quantity. Among the more distinguished members of the company was Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, whose presence would alone have been sufficient to give the occasion an aristocratic prestige in the eyes of Chorcombe party-givers. But in addi-

tion to the heir of Clare Court, there was the possessor of the far richer domain of Egerton Park; and familiar as were Olivia's face and figure to the dwellers in the neighbourhood, her company at a party was always esteemed a grand acquisition. Besides, this evening there was something about her not altogether familiar—a certain glow and sparkle which hardly any one present had noticed in her before, and which would have made her a prominent object of interest and attraction even in a ball-room where her social importance was unknown. In fact there were two or three who declared afterwards that they had had no notion Miss Egerton was so handsome, and that really and truly they considered her to have been quite the belle of the evening. So much can joy do for some faces, and just now Olivia was half delirious with joy and excitement. She had seen a telegram that day announcing the safe arrival at Marseilles of the ship which, as she knew, was bringing her lover home.

But the heroine of the ball and the belle of the evening in her own and the general opinion was decidedly Emmy. Hers was a beauty at

all times more showy than that of Olivia (as has been seen, it was only under favourable circumstances that Olivia could lay claim to beauty at all); and this evening, set off by the most elegant toilet of flowers and lace and blonde that milliner's imagination could devise, she had become, in her own estimation at least, perfectly dazzling. As she took a final survey of her little figure in her glass before descending to the scene of action, she was so much struck with her appearance that she felt quite curious to see what would be the effect on John Thwaites.

The effect on John Thwaites was evidently quite as strong as she could have desired. He entered the ball-room just as the band was about to strike up for the first quadrille, and from the astonished half-dismayed look which he cast round she understood at once that he had not been prepared to find things on nearly so grand a scale. Presently his eyes fastened on herself, and she saw that he was more and more surprised.

He noticed that she was looking, and recovered himself sufficiently to go forward and stammer a "How do you do, Miss Waters?"

"How do you do, Mr. Thwaites?" said Emmy unconcernedly, and then, knowing that he was inspecting her, she examined the fastening of her glove very minutely while she added: "I suppose it is a very fine evening out of doors."

"Oh yes! very—that is, it is raining just now, but of course——" He paused and looked round the room again, then, as though seeking an escape from his confusion, asked timidly: "You have all been quite well, I hope, since last I saw you?"

"Since last you saw us?" said Emmy with a slightly perplexed air, for she did not choose to look as if she had nothing to do but count the days since last she saw John Thwaites.

"At Miss Egerton's," he said eagerly. "That evening of the charade, you know."

"Ah! to be sure, at Miss Egerton's. I declare I had almost forgotten," said Emmy, fiddling with her glove-button again as an excuse for not looking up.

"Miss Waters," said a sonorous voice close to her ear—not John Thwaites's this time—"you remember you are engaged to me for the first

set, I hope? They are just going to begin."

She raised her head, and found Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court standing by her side offering his arm. She was quite startled, for though she had been talking to him only a few minutes before, she had just then forgotten that there was any such person in the world, and slipped her arm within his in some trepidation. As she did so, she let her eyes rest for an instant on John Thwaites's face. There she saw a look of great pain, of such pain that she could not but feel a momentary pang of pain also. Was it possible that he believed she had really forgotten the evening of the charade?

But she had something else to think of than the look of pain on John Thwaites's face, and the twinge of regret or remorse which it had caused her quickly died away. Her partner led her to her place at the top of the room, the music struck up, he bowed and she curtseyed, the first figure was begun, and all compunction was forgotten in a rush of excitement. There she was, actually dancing the first quadrille of her first ball, with Mr. Randal Egerton for her partner (what a polite and deferential partner

he made !), and half Chorcombe standing by to see, John Thwaites among the number. For though she had ceased to feel concern for John Thwaites's pain, she had by no means ceased to take interest in John Thwaites himself, and remembered his presence in the midst of all that there was to distract her.

There certainly was a great deal to distract her. No sooner was the first figure over than the business of attending to her steps was succeeded by the business of attending to her partner's conversation.

"We all owe you a deep debt of gratitude for this evening, Miss Waters," he began, after looking at her for a few moments so attentively that she dropped her eyelids in some confusion. "I was quite certain that you could not plead any cause in vain."

"Indeed!" said Emmy, rather awkwardly, for she felt it desperately difficult to say anything. But she thought of John Thwaites, and determined to do her very best to keep up the conversation with spirit. "I was not at all certain of it myself," she added, pulling open her fan, and then shutting it again.



"Were you not? I should have thought you would have known better the extent of your own influence."

"Oh! well, I have a little influence with papa and mamma, of course."

"Only with them, Miss Waters! And are you really of opinion that the circle of your empire is so limited?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Emmy, fanning herself. "But I am very glad I have succeeded, at any rate. I am so extremely fond of dancing."

"Extremely fond of dancing?" he echoed with a half sigh. "Ah yes! I was sure of it."

"Dear me, how could you be sure of anything of the sort?" she demanded with a little pout, for she was beginning to gain courage. "Because you think me so very frivolous, I suppose."

"Because it is quite impossible that you should fail to enjoy what you make others enjoy so much," he responded in a low voice, and he accompanied the words with a look so strangely expressive that she felt herself ready to drop with flurry and agitation. Still even at this

crisis she did not forget John Thwaites, and, yielding to an irresistible impulse, glanced towards the part of the room where she had seen him last. There he was, exactly in the same place, standing against the wall in an obscure corner, and, as she thought, with his eyes turned in her direction. But he withdrew them the instant they met hers, and fixed them steadfastly, and, as it seemed to her, sullenly, on the floor. She looked at him two or three times again within the next few minutes, but there was no change in his attitude, not even when at the end of the quadrille she and her partner passed him quite close in the final galop. Did he take upon himself then to be angry with her? She felt quite piqued, and determined that she would ask him what had been the matter the very first time they danced together that evening.

But the expected opportunity was very long in coming. She was not much surprised that he did not ask her to dance next time, or next, or even the next again, there being some three or four young men in the room whom he might naturally consider to have a prior claim by superior social standing. But when she had danced

with all these, and still John Thwaites did not come forward, she began to get very much surprised, and a little indignant as well. Did he not know it was his bounden duty to dance with the young lady of the house?—not that she needed partners indeed, she had plenty of them, and to spare, but that was no reason why she should be slighted by John Thwaites. It was true that she had not seen him dancing with anybody else, but if he was going to hang about in dark corners all evening behaving like a perfect bear, what business had he to come at all?

She went on dancing furiously with a long succession of partners, but John Thwaites was not one of them. At last she found herself standing up for a second quadrille with Mr. Egerton, who declared that his turn had certainly come round again; but though others were so anxious for the honour of her hand, John Thwaites had still remained in the background. Was it possible that he was too shy to claim a privilege for which so many were contending? But no, whatever he was, he evidently could not be shy, for there he was ac-

tually coming forward with Miss Egerton on his arm to stand opposite her and her partner. Shy indeed—no, he certainly was not shy, or he never could have had the audacity to ask Miss Egerton of Egerton Park.

The deduction seemed reasonable enough, but, as it happened, the premisses were mistaken. It was not John Thwaites who had asked Miss Egerton, but Miss Egerton who had asked John Thwaites. He had not intended to dance that evening, but Miss Egerton had invited him to stand up with her, and how could he refuse?

“Really, Mr. Thwaites, you make such a capital partner that I can’t imagine how it is you have not been dancing oftener,” said Olivia at the end of the first figure. “And I have not noticed you dancing at all.”

“I have not been dancing at all,” said John, reddening—“not till just now at least.”

“And you would not have been dancing just now if I had not had the impudence to ask you. Pray what do you mean by being so remiss? Don’t you know it is a gentleman’s business to dance at a dancing-party without waiting to be compelled?”

"There are plenty of gentlemen in the room much better partners than I can be," he answered somewhat gloomily, and as he spoke he gave an involuntary glance towards the couple opposite.

"That is a matter of opinion, and at all events you ought to give the ladies a chance of choosing."

"I am afraid the ladies would not thank me for the chance, some of them," said John, still gloomily, and again he gave a glance across the room. "A fellow doesn't care to ask only to be refused."

"But it is your duty to ask whether you are to be refused or not, your duty as regards some ladies at any rate. The young lady of the house, for instance——"

"Oh! she has been dancing all evening," he interrupted hastily; "she wouldn't care to——"

"That makes no difference. In common politeness you ought to ask her, and you have no business to be rude yourself just because you are afraid of rudeness from somebody else."

He did not answer, but next time his hand touched that of Emmy in the course of the figure

he ventured to look into her face with something of an inquiring expression.

"What a delightful quadrille we are having!" she said enthusiastically as she passed him.

"Delightful!" he acquiesced, with a sudden leap at his heart, and forthwith he resolved to engage her for the next dance as soon as ever he should be at liberty. But then he remembered with a jealous pang who was her partner in the quadrille which she found so delightful, and became once more undecided.

"Now recollect, Mr. Thwaites," said Olivia, as he led her to a seat when the dance was over, "I have been giving you a lecture, and I expect to see you profit by it."

"You really think I ought?" said John doubtfully, with yet another glance at Emmy, for, poor fellow, he knew quite well what Olivia was aiming at.

"Of course I think you ought. And I can tell her she has not had a partner to be compared with you all the evening."

A minute or two after this, Emmy, leisurely surveying the company from the chair which Mr. Egerton had with his own hands placed

for her, saw John Thwaites crossing the room straight in her direction. And yet though she knew that he was at last coming to ask her to dance with him, and knew also that she intended to dance with him when asked, she had no sooner caught sight of him than she turned round to say something or other to a lady sitting near her. She was not going to sit like a statue waiting for John Thwaites, not she; if he wanted her, let him come up and stand till she was ready to speak to him. So she went on talking to her friend, making sure that John Thwaites was close at hand watching his opportunity. But when, having said all that she could find to say, she looked round again, he was not there, and presently she saw him quite in another part of the room. Her strategy on this occasion had not been successful.

She thought that he would soon make another attempt to reach her, but she was wrong again. She danced a great many times, and with a great many different partners, still John Thwaites never came near her. At last the hour of supper arrived (and somehow, remembering that pleasant supper at Miss Egerton's, she had

always pictured herself being taken into the supper-room under John Thwaites's escort), but even then he continued to keep aloof. She was not deserted by everybody, however, for Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court had come forward in the politest, most respectful manner imaginable, and petitioned for the honour of taking her in to supper in accents that were almost imploring. Of course she had assented, only too glad to let John Thwaites see that she had found somebody willing to undertake the task of serving her. And how exquisitely was the task performed by this new attendant of hers, with what courteous solicitude was her every want forestalled, with what watchful gallantry her every movement observed! Then he was talking to her almost the whole of the time, pouring into her ear a succession of low-voiced compliments that kept her in a state of perpetual blush and simper. It was certain that John Thwaites, though he was too far off to hear what was said, could not fail to see that she was getting on very well without him.

Nor did Mr. Egerton's ministrations cease even when he had escorted her back to the ball-



room. They were among the first to re-enter it, and Emmy had expected that, following the example of some other gentlemen whom they had met returning to the supper-table after disposing of their fair charges, he would leave her while he went back to finish his wine. But he evidently had no idea of giving her up so easily, and, having established her in a secluded corner where an open door made a sort of screen to shield them partially from public view, he brought up another chair and installed himself by her side.

"It is such a luxury to get an opportunity for a little quiet interchange of ideas after all this bustle. I hope you do not grudge it to me, Miss Waters."

"Oh no! of course," faltered Emmy. "But you must not stay here on my account, you know. I am afraid you have been neglecting yourself dreadfully."

"Neglecting myself! Oh dear, no! I am much too selfish for that. On the contrary, I have been indulging myself—pampering myself, I may almost say—and here I am indulging myself still."

"Indeed," said Emmy, casting down her eyes. "I hardly understand what you mean by that."

"Do you not? You don't understand that this to me is just the most enjoyable part of the whole evening?"

"Well, it is rather difficult to understand, certainly."

"It is not at all enjoyable to you then?" he asked reproachfully.

"Oh! I didn't quite say that," protested Emmy, and began fanning herself in a vain endeavour to conceal her self-consciousness.

"Let me do that for you," said Randal pleadingly, and gently possessed himself of the fan. "There, do you like it? Tell me if I am doing it properly."

"Oh! you are doing it beautifully; it is very pleasant indeed. But you are giving yourself so much trouble."

"Trouble—it is the greatest pleasure in the world. I only wish I could look forward to enjoying it for the next three hours to come."

Emmy did not answer for an instant. Two or three gentlemen were just then entering by

the door near which she was sitting, and, having recognised in one of them John Thwaites (she knew it was he though she did not see his face), she could not immediately call back her attention. But she managed to recover herself in time.

“For three hours!” she laughed. “Oh! what a very unprofitable occupation for three hours!”

And then she let her eyes wander once more towards John Thwaites. Actually he had taken up his station just in front of her—he was talking to another gentleman, and so had not noticed who was behind him.

“That depends on how you define unprofitable, Miss Waters. For my part I don’t see how an occupation can be unprofitable that makes one intensely happy.”

“Oh dear! what shocking nonsense!”

“Yes, shocking nonsense to you, no doubt. You could not sit here and be fanned for three hours without getting tired of it, I suppose—not at least if I was the fanner?”

“Oh! Mr. Egerton!” murmured Emmy, greatly confused, all the more so that she thought she

saw John Thwaites turn his head slightly as though to listen.

"Could you?" persisted Randal. "Do tell me if you think you could."

Emmy laughed and blushed, and for the first moment knew not what to say. In the next, however, she detected a side-glance which John Thwaites was directing towards her, and understood that he was really listening. Well, at all events she was not going to be dictated to by *him*.

"Oh yes! of course I could. Indeed I think I should like it very much—it is so cool and pleasant."

"Thank you, Miss Waters. Ah! if you knew how it increases my enjoyment to be able to believe that you partially share it!"

He looked at her with more eloquence of expression than there had been in his eyes yet, and there is no knowing what he might have gone on to add if at that juncture Olivia, who had been observing the pair from the other side of the room, had not come forward, saying very sweetly:

"Oh! Randal, I think I have left my hand-

kerchief in the supper-room. Might I trouble you to go and look for it?"

Randal frowned slightly, but declared that he would go with the greatest pleasure. Olivia thanked him and glided back to her seat, looking rather meaningly at John Thwaites as she did so. Perhaps she expected him to go and speak to Emmy now that the coast was clear.

He did go and speak to Emmy presently, but it was with a voice so cold and measured that it did not seem to be his at all.

"Good-bye, Miss Waters; I am going away now."

"Going away!" said Emmy almost with a start. "Why, the evening has hardly begun."

"Good-bye, Miss Waters," said John obstinately.

He looked so determined that Emmy felt quite overawed. He was evidently very much offended, and she did not want him to be offended irrevocably.

"Had you not better stay for a little more dancing? There is the band just going to begin."

"I don't want any more dancing, thank you. No, I cannot stay any longer."

"What! not just for the first quadrille after supper?" said Emmy, looking up with something of a beseeching expression in her face, **for she** really wanted him very much to stay.

The beseeching expression was not without its effect. He stood apparently wavering for a second or two, then said abruptly:

"If you will dance it with me, Miss Emmy."

"I! Oh yes! certainly," said Emmy, so much taken aback that she had not even presence of mind to study the little ivory tablets which she kept for noting down her engagements, and which she had made a great parade of consulting all through the evening.

The music struck up, and in great agitation he offered his arm, which in almost equal agitation she accepted, and presently they found themselves standing together at the side of the room, waiting for the first and second couples to lead off.

There was silence between them for a little while, neither having any clear idea of what it would be desirable to say. At last, as John

was casting about for something with which to begin the conversation, his eye fell on Randal Egerton, who had just re-entered the room and was looking eagerly towards the place where he had left Emmy. As John saw, a very bitter look crossed his face, and turning to Emmy he spoke without further hesitation.

"I am afraid I have been very presumptuous in asking you to dance with me when there are so many in the room whom no doubt you would prefer. I can't think what made me do it, really."

Emmy hardly knew how to answer. The words themselves implied only an excess of humility, but there was something in the manner with which they were spoken that suggested that humility had nothing to do with them. Could it be that he meant to find fault with her for having danced with anybody but himself? If so, what unparalleled audacity!

"There are certainly some gentlemen here who dance particularly well," she answered, fencing with the subject. "And it is a great luxury to dance with a good partner."

"Of course it must be," said John, and this

time there was no mistaking the under-tone of irony in his voice. "And that makes me the more sorry for having deprived you of it."

Emmy could not return an immediate answer, being just then summoned to execute her share in the figure. But all the time that she was dancing she was meditating on John Thwaites's intolerable pretensions. Did he think she was going to let herself be called to account by him? But she would say something that would punish him nicely.

"Have you noticed what a beautiful dancer Mr. Egerton is?" she asked as soon as she rejoined him.

"Oh yes! I have noticed everything. And I think it is almost a pity you do not dance with him every time when you enjoy it so much."

"Oh! but you know it would not be the thing to dance with the same gentleman quite every time, however much one might like it," said Emmy demurely, for she was determined to let him see that she was not to be put down so easily as he thought.

"It would be no worse to dance with the same gentleman every time than to let him fan



you for three hours," retorted John with a kind of desperate courage, while all the blood in his body seemed to rush to his face. "And I heard you say you would not object to that."

"You heard me say so, Mr. Thwaites?" repeated Emmy, trifling rather nervously with her handkerchief, for the boldness of the accusation really did put her out a little.

"Yes, I heard it. And if I had not heard it with my own ears I could not have believed that you would have said such things—to that moustachioed fortune-hunting dandy—and let him say such things to you, no, that I could not."

"I don't see what right you have to speak to me in that way," said Emmy, looking a little subdued, however.

"What right! What! when you gave me that ribbon——"

The conversation was interrupted again here, and really Emmy was so much upset that she was quite glad to have a little time to collect her thoughts. What should she do?—let him have his own way and say no more about it? He was in such a passion that perhaps it would

be the best plan. And yet no, it would never do to let him think that he had conquered.

"What ribbon?" she asked innocently, when they were standing together again.

"What ribbon? do you pretend to forget that ribbon which you gave me the night of the cha——"

"Which I gave you, Mr. Thwaites?"

"Well, which you let me take, then; it comes to much the same."

"I don't see that at all. If you chose to pick up something that belonged to me——"

"I ought to have given it back again, ought I not? Well, I will give it back again now if you like; it is not too late."

"Oh! of course not. The dress is not nearly worn out yet, and it really looks quite stupid with one of the bows missing."

"The bow shall not be missing long. I will send it back to-morrow. You will find it none the worse for having been in my possession; I have been storing it up, like a fool, in the desk where I keep all my greatest treasures. But I shall not be a fool any more—I will send it back to-morrow."

Emmy felt something in her throat which prevented her from answering at once. So he was actually going to send back the ribbon, was he? that ribbon which he had made such promises and professions on receiving. Then everything was to be at an end between them? Well, what must be, must be—she could not ask him to keep the ribbon, of course. But she was so much agitated that she scarcely knew how she got through the next figure.

When it was over she waited for a minute to see if he had anything more to add. But he stood by her side in moody silence, and with rather an unsteady voice she said :

“ If you have anything of mine to send back, I hope you will not do it so as to make papa or mamma or anybody else think it was I who gave it you. I would almost rather you kept it than that I should be disgraced like that.”

“ Yes, you would think it a dreadful disgrace to have given *me* anything, I suppose.”

Emmy's heart throbbed with pain and anger. How cruel he was, and vindictive and unforgiving—and how he would like to trample her under foot! But she would not let him.

"A dreadful disgrace—indeed I should," she answered, half clenching her little hand as she spoke. "I should consider I had let myself down to the very dust. But I did not give it to you ; you know very well I did not."

"It is quite enough that you wish nobody to think so," he said, looking very pale. "You need not be afraid ; I shall find some way of sending it back without disgracing you."

So he was quite determined to send it back then ! She did not say more ; she would have despised herself if she had added another syllable. He did not speak either, and, so far as these two were concerned, the dance was finished in profound silence. Emmy thought it possible that when it was over he might make some attempt to renew the conversation, but he did not. Without a word he led her back to the place where he had found her, and, bowing silently, turned on his heel. In another minute he had passed out of the room.

Nobody could have watched Emmy for the rest of that evening and suspected for an instant that there was the slightest cloud on the completeness of her enjoyment. She danced an

immense deal, and with an appearance of almost delirious delight, and laughed and chattered away to her various partners with more vivacity than as yet she had shown at all. Mr. Randal Egerton of Clare Court, who, dancing with her oftener than anybody else, had the best opportunities of judging, particularly remarked her apparent elation, and, ascribing it to his own attentions, felt quite flattered.

But when everybody had gone away and the house was once more restored to quiet, Emmy did not feel quite so happy or self-complacent as might have been expected from her previous exhilaration. On the contrary, there weighed upon her a sense of profound dissatisfaction with herself and others, against which she had been vainly doing battle, and which now came back to take almost entire possession of her. And so John Thwaites had chosen to quarrel with her! She was not to blame of course; still perhaps there were some things which she had better not have said—about the ribbon, for instance, and the dress looking stupid without it. But surely he would not really send it back—surely he would change his mind when the time

came. Perhaps indeed he had never seriously intended to send it back at all ; it was quite possible that he might now and then say things he did not altogether mean, just as she herself did occasionally. Oh yes ! he had put it in the desk where he kept all his greatest treasures, and certainly he could never bring himself to take it out again—not at least if he had ever cared about her as he said he did.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.











